NEW
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*

No. 556 NEW YORK, AUGUST 24, 1907. **Price, Five Cents**

A BAD MAN OF MONTANA

OR

NICK CARTER'S CHASE OF AN OUTLAW

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"

Through the open doorway Nick Carter could see the figure of Kid Curry bending over Major Corson's leather box and deftly arranging the money it contained.

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Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1907, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C.

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A BAD MAN OF MONTANA;

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Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A BUNCH OF BAD MEN.

It becomes our duty in relating this story to look in upon a small gathering of men that took place a short time before Nick Carter had definite knowledge of the fact, but with which he was later made acquainted; indeed, his acquaintance with the scenes that followed upon that meeting, and the case which grew out of it, were brought about in quite an unusual way, and entirely by accident. It should be added here that at the very moment that this meeting began Nick Carter was a little more than a hundred miles away as the crow flies.

In a word, Nick Carter was at Fort Benton, Montana, at the time; the meeting referred to was held in a small town directly to the east of Fort Benton—a place called Landusky—located well down toward the southeast corner of Choteau County, on the southern slope of the Little Rocky Mountains.

The meeting of the several men in Landusky was held in a saloon, of course, and there were present at it five individuals.

Three of the men who attended it were known as Kid Curry, Jew Jake, and Ira Benson, and all three of them had once been well known around that locality—especially the first one mentioned—Kid Curry. They had been known for the reputation they had earned for desperate lawlessness, and, if the truth be told, were about all that was left in the State of Montana of the original type of "Bad Men."

Kid Curry had been known throughout the State, and, indeed, in several other States as well, as a daring outlaw who feared nothing and who hesitated at nothing when he started out on one of his expeditions of outlawry. He bore the record of many killings, so that if he had followed the supposed custom of notching his knife-handle for each man he had slain, the weapon would have been rendered almost useless.

But Kid Curry had broken the law once too often—or, at least, you would have been so informed by the regular residents around that part of the State. The Coburn boys, Wallace and Bill and Bob, out at Circle C, would have so informed you; and so would Alick Black, Jim Thornhill, and Pike Landusky himself, had he been around there to give you information at the time.

They would have told you that Kid Curry had been captured and sent to prison; that he had succeeded in breaking jail; that he had gone to Tennessee and had been captured again, only to escape a second time after a spell in prison—and they would have told you that

now he was busily engaged in following his old mode of life down in Argentina, in South America, where he was robbing banks and trains, coaches and solitary travelers, shooting and killing at random, and otherwise comporting himself according to the reputation he had earned in the North.

They would also have informed you that they were mighty glad he was so far away, and they hoped that he would decide to remain in South America until somebody "got him" just as he had succeeded in "getting" so many others.

But the truth was that he had returned to his old haunts, although the Coburn boys, and Thornhill and Black and the others around there had no idea of it. The Kid had succeeded in making even South America too hot for him after a while, and he had had to decamp from there just as he had been obliged to flee from other places in the past—in order to save his leather-like neck from being stretched.

Wary always, far-seeing, and cautious even in his recklessness, the Kid had figured it out that he would be safer for a time in the neighborhood of his old haunts, after his return to America, than anywhere else. He believed that he would be least expected there, and, anyhow, that almost all the world he knew believed him to be still in South America.

That explains how it happened that Landusky saw him again; it explains also why he was not seen there in daylight, but had preferred to lie in hiding at an old retreat he had out at the Four Buttes—at least that was generally supposed to be where the retreat was located; the fact was that nobody but the Kid himself did know.

But when he showed up in Landusky it was after dark, and he brought Ira Benson with him—for Ira was one whom the Kid knew he could trust, and who was not too well known to others around there; one who had been associated with him in the past in one way and another, and who could be depended upon to get together some of the old spirits who had once grouped themselves around the Kid—and what was more important, would be glad to do it without permitting the information to creep out generally that the Kid had returned.

And this Ira Benson had done. He had found Jew Jake, and had picked up three other men from over Bear Paw way with whom to form the nucleus of a gang such as Kid Curry delighted to lead.

The saloon where they met? We won't give it a name, for they immediately adjourned elsewhere—to a place where they could discuss their affairs without fear of interruption, or of being overheard.

That other place we need describe only as a comfortable room where the wooden shutters could be kept tightly closed, and where they could be supplied from a known source with all the liquid refreshment they desired to absorb while they talked.

It was ten o'clock in the evening when they foregathered; it lacked but a short time of daylight when they separated—but we are getting rather ahead of the story now.

The Kid did not enter the saloon at all. He was not yet ready to let it be known that he was "on earth again in that neighborhood," and he knew to enter the saloon would be to invite instant recognition. He had already planned a coup, and he preferred to carry it off first, and to get people around there guessing before he let it be whispered, "The Kid is back again."

But Benson and Jake and their three friends hung about the saloon for quite a time during the evening—before they departed from it to keep their appointment with the Kid; and they utilized the time in letting themselves be seen by the frequenters of the place and in making themselves "solid" with the bunch that came in during the evening.

Bob Coburn was down from Dry Beaver, and Jim Thornhill blew in for a few minutes during the evening, but those were the only ones who entered the place who interest us in the least.

Coburn was not long in noticing the presence of strangers, in company of Jew Jake, whom he knew, and he turned to Thornhill once and said:

"Jim, who is that bunch over there?"

"Search me, Bob," was the reply. "I heard one uh them mention something about Bear Paw a minute ago, so I reckon they blew in from over that way. Likely lookin' lot. I don't think!"

"I know one of 'em—by sight," remarked Coburn; "that lanky-looking guy with the scar on his cheek-bone. His name's Benson. Scar Benson, I've heard him called."

"Looks like he'd wear stripes becomingly, that gazabo," muttered Thornhill. "Looks like he'd carried more hot irons around with him than belonged to him, some time 'r other; eh?"

"I don't much cotton tuh the looks uh any of 'em," replied Coburn. "Jake seems to be getting mighty familiar with the bunch, too. Reckon I'll keep an eye on my creatures while that outfit is grazin' round here; eh, Jim?"

"Sure thing, Bob. I've been a-wonderin' since I spotted 'em here, if——" He stopped, and after waiting a moment Coburn said gently:

"If what?"

"Maybe you don't know about it, either, Bob."

"Maybe I don't; but I will if you tell me. What yuh drivin' at, anyhow?"

"I don't suppose yuh've heard about that house-boat business that's for floatin' down the river pretty soon; eh?"

"Nary a word. What about it?"

"Major Corson is getting up the affair. I only heard about it the other day, but as far as I can find out it's going to be a swell thing all around. I wouldn't mind bein' invited to take the trip myself. There'll be loads to eat and drink and plenty uh time to win and lose three or four fortunes on the way down, I'm thinking."

"What the blazes are yuh talking about, Jim?" demanded Coburn impatiently. "Your talk is sure all Greek tuh me, Thorny. Yuh ain't been dreamin' something bad, have yuh?"

"It's a flatboat expedition down the Missouri, I tell you."

"Whose? Major Corson's?"

"Yes."

"Well, he can afford it, and I reckon his outfit won't miss him none, either. They get along better over there when he's away, anyhow; at least that's what I've heard them say. He's a good enough feller, and all that, but what he don't know about runnin' a ranch would fill a good big dictionary. What's he goin' tuh do? Tell me about it."

"I can only tell you what I've heard."

"That's all I want to know, Jim."

"Well, he bought a lot uh lumber from somewhere and had it shipped over tuh his place; and he has been about three months building a flatboat with a house on top of it. I understand that he fitted the thing up like a palace, with sleepin'-rooms and bathrooms and all that till yuh can't rest. He's got a smoking-room, which same is also a card-room; he's got a cook-house and a big grub-room where they eat, and he has stocked the hull thing up with the choicest sort uh grub and firewater tuh consume while they're floatin' down the muddy."

"Go on; what are they goin' tuh do the floating for?"

"Tuh get somewhere, I suppose. They say they're going to float all the way to St. Louis, if they can make it; anyhow, to Omaha or Kansas City, before they leave the boat and take a train for the East. And he has invited a small party to go with him."

"But what's the object, Jim?"

"On the outside, it is just for the fun uh the thing, but I have heard that the major is stowin' away a lot uh things that are valuable. I heard, too, that there would be a lot uh money aboard the boat when she started—something like a hundred and fifty thousand dollars or thereabouts."

"What for? What does he want to take that money with him for?"

"I don't know, Bob, unless it's true that he is going to do some speculating on the way down. I did hear that he was going to buy ranches all along the route; that he was buying 'em up for some sort of a syndicate that he represents, and that the money he takes along with him is to enable him to pay cash, or at least to pay down enough on each purchase he makes to clinch the bargain."

"Some sort of a trust business, eh?"

"Looks like it."

"How many are going tuh be in that there party, Jim?"

"I don't know any more about that than you do—only I heard that a big detective gazabo from the East was tuh be one uh them."

"Who?"

"Nick Carter. Ever hear of him, Bob?"

"Can't say that I have, Jim. Who is he?"

"Oh, he's a detective, all right, I guess. He's got some sort of a reputation in the East for catchin' crooks and doin' 'em up to the queen's taste. Maybe they've got him along tuh sort uh protect the cash, eh?"

"Maybe so. It's a job I wouldn't a-minded havin' myself. And say, Jim, you heah me!"

"Well?"

"If what you say about that boat outfit is true, they'll need some sort of protection before they get very far down the muddy—with that sort of a bunch that we're a-watchin' right now layin' around idle and permiscuous. Since what you've said about the house-boat business it looks as if a feller could guess why that bunch yonder has blown in. Eh?"

CHAPTER II.

THE OUTLAWS' CONSULTATION.

Jim Thornhill leaned his elbow on the bar holding his hand, with the glass in it, before his face in such a manner that he could gaze over it and study one after another the five men who were grouped around the table at the far end of the room.

The suggestion just made by Bob Coburn had not even remotely occurred to him before, although he had not been a little surprised to see so many strangers grouped together at one time in a Landusky hotel.

Thornhill also knew something about the reputation of Jew Jake and Scar Benson, and particularly that the latter was supposed to have traveled with many an outfit whose intentions were never honest.

There was no apparent reason why strangers should have blown in at Landusky at such a time, unless there had been a bunch of cattle somewhere in the neighborhood that they were driving, or else they were seeking employment upon one of the neighboring ranches; but this, however, both he and Coburn knew not to be the case.

While he leaned on his elbow studying the men over his glass he recalled to his mind rather more particularly the story he had heard concerning the house-boat on

which Major Corson was to float down the Missouri River.

Major Corson, be it said, was a retired English army officer now, past middle age, who had spent the greater part of his life with the army in India, and who, after his retirement, had followed the example of many others of his kind and had gone to the far Western part of America, lured there by the stories he had heard about the delights of ranch life and the remunerative possibilities of raising cattle for the market.

Backed by a plentiful supply of capital in the beginning, the major had speedily acquired large tracts of land both in Choteau and Fergus Counties as well as another one somewhere near Piny Butte in Dawson, and having stocked his properties with all the cattle they would feed, and engaged outfits to care for them respectively, he utilized his time in riding from one to another of them, inspecting them and otherwise enjoying life as such a man knows so well how to do.

The major had made many friends and almost no enemies at all among the rough but splendid Montanans, although these men did not hesitate openly to make fun of his theories at times.

But, altogether, the major was generally recognized as being a good fellow, and so had many friends among the other good fellows with whom he came in contact.

It was known to every one that he was constantly investing money for others of his countrymen whom he represented by buying lands in various parts of the country, and therefore it was not surprising that he should contemplate such a trip as this one to which Thornhill had referred; that is, of floating down the Missouri River in a house-boat and stopping here and there from time to time on their way through North and South Dakota to Nebraska and Iowa and so on to the end of their journey.

It is quite natural that if he did contemplate making investments en route he should take with him a goodly supply of cash for that purpose, and it must be borne in mind that where such an expedition is planned rumor will keep multiplying the sum of the amount of money to be carried until it reaches alarming proportions; certainly enough to excite the cupidity of any chance train-robbers or road-agents who might hear of it; and it is only a step from train robbery to holding up a barge on the river, the latter, possibly, being very much easier of accomplishment.

Thornhill knew but very little more of the particulars than have already been outlined in his conversation with Coburn, but he decided then and there that he would find out more about it at once, and also that he would manage to keep half an eye on Scar Benson and Jew Jake and their cronies.

Bob Coburn left the saloon a few minutes later, but Thornhill dropped down into a chair in one corner, having found a paper which he pretended to read while he watched furtively the men in the far corner of the room who interested him.

It was not long after that that Benson got up with one of the three who were strangers and went out; ten minutes later another of the strangers followed, and ten minutes after he had gone Jew Jake went out with the last one; and so the outfit, whose appearance had disturbed Coburn and Thornhill, was gone.

There was no doubt in Thornhill's mind that these men had gone to some previously arranged rendezvous, but it is certain that it never occurred to him that so famous, and, at the same time, infamous a character as Kid Curry was waiting there near at hand. If he had thought of such a possibility, and believed in it, he would have been absolutely certain that some big act of outlawry was in preparation.

Could he have followed them, which he did not attempt to do—but which, for the sake of the chronology of this story we are permitted to do in anticipation of what is to come—he would have seen them seek the room to which reference has already been made, where Kid Curry was awaiting them, having ridden in from his hiding-place only a little while before.

Gathered around the table, at the head of which the Kid was seated, the latter came to the point at once, for the introductions between the Kid and the three men who had been brought by Benson and Jew Jake was a matter of exceeding informality.

"Yuh know me, boys," said the Kid, looking slowly from one to the other of them and speaking with deliberation, "or if yuh don't know me yuh know about me, which is sufficient. I s'pose that Scar Benson and the Jew here have told yuh my name, as I said they might, but havin' uttered it once that'll about do; I don't want to have it chucked around heah too promiscuous, for it's just as well for my health and the health of some others I c'd mention that folks don't find out I'm back right away."

He stopped for a moment to let that settle, turning his cold, almost expressionless eyes from one face to the other until he had looked upon them all, and then he went on:

"The fact is, I have been back some time, but, as the crooks say out in the East, I have thought it best to keep 'under cover' for the present. But I have been over to the fort, up to the falls, and down to Lewiston and to other places around these four counties, sort uv plannin' out what I'd do and how I'd make out later on.

"All that doesn't matter to you fellers. All that I need to tell yuh now is that the other day when I was at the falls I hit up with an old-timer who put me on to a little lay that's goin' to happen here in a few days that's got somethin' in it for all of us if we could only make it work."

"That's the talk!" said one of the three strangers, and he wished he hadn't spoken, for the Kid turned his cold eyes upon him for a moment and remarked quietly:

"'Little children should be seen and not heard.'

"As I was sayin', boys, there's a rich chap that owns a lot uh ranches in this place and some uh the other counties, who piled into this country just before I went away, by the name of Major Corson; he's an English lord or duke or somethin', and he's got money to burn; and just as if he hadn't enough uh it uh his own, some pals uh his over on the other side of the ocean have sent him a lot more to invest for them. Are you-all keepin' tabs on this little conversation uh mine?"

"We sure are, Kid," replied Benson, answering for the others as well as himself.

"Well, it's this a-way," the Kid continued. "This Major Corson has built a big flatboat up at his place, which is about the head uh Beer Creek, and he's put that boat inter the Missouri River, and built a house on it, and he's fitted that house up as if it was a palace, and he's stocked it with all sorts uh things to eat an' drink an' to make life comfortable when he's aboard."

"What's it all for?" asked Jew Jake.

"Mebbe, Jake, if yuh'd take the cotton out uh yuh ears and hold that trap uh yours shet long 'nough you'll find out."

"All right, Kiddie, I'll do that," responded Jake readily.

"The fact is," continued the Kid, "the Englishman is goin' to float down the river an' stop at places where he thinks he wants to buy land, an' I've got it pretty straight that he's goin' to take close on to half a million dollahs in cash along with him. I don't know anythin' about the amount, an' I expect it's overestimated, but if he takes one-fifth as much as that it'll be worth our while to get it."

A general murmur of approval went the rounds, and the Kid, after helping himself out of the bottle and rolling another cigarette, proceeded:

"I took a good deal uh pains to find out just who an' what kind of an outfit the Englishman intended to have aboard of the house-boat with him, an' as near as I can round up the situation there'll be himself an' four guests, a Chinese cook, an' two or three men to manage the boat an' do the hard work that may be necessary while they're floatin' down."

"Let's see," said Benson. "That makes eight or nine men altogether there'll be aboard of it, won't it?"

"About that," said the Kid. "The Englishman an' his four guests make five, the Chinaman makes six, and two or three men to run the boat make eight or nine. Yuh're right, Scar."

"Did you get any hunches who those two or three men who are runnin' the boat are likely to be?" asked Jew Jake.

"Nary a hunch, Jakey. But you can write it down good an' plenty that it won't be any uh the cow-puncher outfit from his ranch. A boat don't steer the same way as a horse, an' when you're aboard uh them yuh don't handle yuhr ropes the same way, either, an' I reckon he'll be bringin' somebody down from the Falls, or he'll have to take up some lumbermen who know somethin' about boats an' ropes and such things."

"Do yuh know when this expedition starts?" asked Benson.

"No, Scar, I don't, an' it's what yuh've got to find out, an' it's what this meetin's for. As near as I can guess now, they're gettin' ready pretty fast, an' it's most time for them to set out, an' in all probability they'll cast loose in somethin' less then a week, an' we ought to be ready for them by that time."

"Right yuh are, Kid."

"Yuh see," went on the outlaw, "if we take into consideration the bends in the river, the place they're goin' to start from, an' the spot where we ought to head them off, they'll have to float between eighty an' a hundred miles before they come up to us, an' 'lowing they make five miles an hour—an' they won't do much better'n that if they do anything—it would take them just about a full day to get down where we'd be waitin' for them."

"There's another point," said Benson. "Where do yuh figure would be a good place to wait foh them?"

"Scar, yuh give me a pain, yuh sure do. We don't know where to wait for them till we know what time they're goin' to cast loose, because we want to figure to hit up with 'em just about an hour before daylight, an' we got to figure on the current in order to find out where they're likely to be, an' it's all about these particulars that yuh an' one of this outfit have got to ascertain for us in the meantime.

"Yuh can take any one of the fellers yuh choose and start right out from here to-night on yuh scout. I'll take the rest of the push up to my place with me, an' when yuh get back with the information, yuh know how to signal to let me know as how yuh're around."

"Sure, Kid, I know that."

"Well that finishes up this confabulation for to-night. I reckoned there was some fellers in that saloon before yuh came in here who spotted the presence of strangers, wasn't there?"

"There sure was."

"Who was there? Any of the Coburn boys?"

"One—Bob—an' he had that fire-eatin' Jim Thornhill with him."

The Kid smiled grimly.

"They're a likely push—those Coburns an' Thornhill; it's just as well, as long as those two fellers saw yuh in the saloon to-night, that we'd better mosey out uh here now and get back to the saloon before they

close up. There's no use uh raisin' their suspicions yet; a little later on I won't care how much they know."

It is a fact, however, that they did not leave the room until just before daylight.

One question led to another, and an answer to further questioning, and the six outlaws had finally planned their campaign so thoroughly that they knew exactly what was to be done and also when to do it save for the qualifications that would be made upon receipt of the information for which Scar Benson was going in search.

What they did not know, and what might have given them some uneasiness had they been aware of it, was the fact that when they did file from the room about an hour before the dawn, and after they had passed on through the gloom and disappeared, Jim Thornhill pulled himself out from under the building in which they had been holding their meeting and also glided away in the darkness.

CHAPTER III.

A NEW KIND OF A HOLD-UP.

And now Nick Carter steps into the story.

The detective had been indulging himself in an experience to which he was almost a stranger. He had been taking a vacation.

He had been visiting the camp of a friend of his over on the slope of the Rocky Mountains in Teton County, up near the Blackfoot Indian Reservation, and upon his return had made a considerable stop at the city of Great Falls at the house of another friend, Major Cholmondeley Corson.

There had been something mutually attractive between the detective and the English officer, and the result of their short acquaintance was that the Englishman not only insisted that Nick should spend a few days at his ranch, which was located some distance below Fort Benton, and almost directly south of the Bear Paw Mountains, but he also explained to him his plans now nearing completion for the cruise down the "Big Muddy."

At first the detective regarded it as being almost impossible that he should accompany the major for the trip on the house-boat, but when the Englishman explained to him the arrangements he had made, and had told about the company they would have aboard the boat, the inducement to form one of the party was made so strong that Nick finally telegraphed to New York that he had decided to lengthen his vacation indefinitely, and that they were to expect no more news of him there until he wired them from Kansas City, explaining that, in the meantime, he would be without post-office and telegraphic address himself.

Thus we see how it happened that Nick Carter became one of the house-boat party, and thus we know that it was only an accident that he should have been on hand when the incidents which made this story possible occurred. He accompanied the major from Great Falls to Fort Benton, and from the fort to the ranch south of the Bear Paws, where he met the other members of the party who were to take the journey.

Rumor had made some mistakes in the information she had given to Jim Thornhill as well as to the outlaws who were planning to hold up and rob this house-boat, but the mistakes had reference merely to the passenger-list of the expedition.

The company that was to travel upon this sumptuously appointed craft, made only to float and depending solely upon the strength of the current for its motive power, consisted of Major Corson, the major's wife and daughter, the major's niece, who name was Lola Craddock, the major's friend, James Montague, also an Englishman, who was interested with the major in his investments, and Nick Carter. In addition there were two men engaged at Great Falls whose business it was to handle the boat and do the hard work connected with it. So this made a party of six passengers and two men; the outlaws had been certain in their knowledge concerning the Chinese cook.

Nick arrived at the ranch accompanied by the major; the other members of the party were already there.

The boat had been finished and fitted up, and most of the stores and a few other trifling matters had to be attended to before they were ready to cast off and begin their floating journey of many hundreds of miles.

Nevertheless, it was almost a week after the detective arrived at the major's ranch before everything was in readiness and the party went aboard the boat ready for the trip.

It was six o'clock on Sunday morning when the start was made, a beautiful Sunday morning in June, and the detective felt when once the lines were cast off, and the boat was well in the river feeling the force of the current, as if he had indeed cut himself loose from all his associations and isolated himself almost as completely as if he were in the middle of the Pacific on a raft.

There was a sense of elation about it now, for it has been very rarely indeed in the busy life of Nick Carter that he has been so far removed from the daily grind and constant occupation of his profession.

It is certain that not one among this joyous party thought of the possibility of any trouble whatever, or danger arising by means of that trip save the very slight one of occasional fierce squalls of wind; of floating logs in the river; of snags that might have grounded her and then have pierced the hull of the boat unless they were guarded against, and of the possibility of submerged rocks for them to run against.

Of outlawry and robbery it is certain that not one of them had a thought, and yet the fact remains that at the

very moment when the *Ark*, as she was facetiously called, was pushed out into the stream, Scar Benson and Blue Peter, who was one of the three strange outlaws already referred to, so named because there was an uncanny purplish tint to his skin, sat their horses behind a neighboring bluff, from whence they could see every incident of the proceedings, and as soon as the boat began to move down the stream with the force of the current they wheeled their horses about and dashed away to the east, riding with a swift and steady gait, and thinking nothing of the seventy or eighty miles they had to cover before they would catch up with Kid Curry and the rest of his outfit who were waiting them down near the southeast corner of Choteau County.

But Benson and his companion had prepared relays of horses along their route so they would not be delayed, and they figured that they would arrive at their destination many hours in advance of the boat, not only because their route would be more direct and necessarily shorter, but also because they could travel faster.

Aboard the boat the beginning of the trip was a joyful occasion. A little banquet had been held the evening before in the spacious dining-room, and the party of travelers had slept aboard that Saturday night in preparation for the coming trip, although it had been deemed best not to begin it until the early morning of the ensuing day.

Alice Corson and Lola Craddock were beautiful girls of about the same age, and although they were only cousins they resembled each other closely enough to have been referred to as twin-sisters, while Mrs. Corson, the mother and aunt respectively, was so youthful in her manner and appearance that she might easily have been mistaken for another sister.

It did not take the detective long after their departure to determine two things in his mind, both of which were rather interesting, somewhat puzzling because of the possibilities they suggested, and certainly entertaining to watch and study. This something was the fact that James Montague was desperately in love with one of the girls, although assiduously devoted to the other in his attentions and manner.

Nick, accustomed as he was to studying people and their motives, decided almost at once that it was Lola Craddock, the niece, and until he had watched the man for some little time he supposed, in an idle sort of way, that at least one of the reasons for the arrangements of the trip might be attributed to this fact; but they had not gone very far when the detective saw that Montague seemed deliberately to avoid Miss Craddock and devote himself almost entirely to the daughter of Major Corson.

A conversation he had with Mrs. Corson during the afternoon of that day partly explained this to him, for he learned as a result of it that, while Alice was heiress to a great fortune, not only to her father's wealth, but to another one as well, which was rather indefinitely referred to, Lola Craddock was penniless, and really lived upon the bounty of her uncle and aunt.

And now for a moment we must return again to Kid Curry and his outfit.

It was six o'clock in the morning when Scar Benson and his companion started on their long ride to meet them, and it was shortly after seven o'clock that evening when the two men pulled up in a coulée within five or six miles of Beauchamp Creek, which was the rendezvous which had been appointed. As soon as they arrived the six men put their heads together and began at once figuring upon the strength and swiftness of the current that was bringing the boat toward them, trying to determine as quickly as possible at what hour it would pass the place at which they were hid, for it was definitely agreed upon between them that if the *Ark* floated past them at the right hour no better spot could be found for the attack upon it.

They were elated, therefore, when they came to the determination that the boat should pass there somewhere between two and six o'clock the following morning, and immediately they set about their preparations for this new and hitherto unheard of kind of hold-up.

The time that had passed since the conversation was held by them in that room in Landusky had been employed in perfecting their arrangements, and the Kid, who was ever a good one at making plans, had worked out what he regarded as a perfect means of making the hold-up a success.

In pursuance of his idea the men had managed to possess themselves of three boats; one was made of an old piano-box which they had found somewhere, and which they had calked with rags and cotton. Another was a dugout, and still another was an old flat-bottomed punt, both of which they had picked up along the shore of the river and mended until they were in condition for use.

With these it was their intention to board the boat silently in midstream as it floated past them in the darkness of the early morning.

It was to be the work of four of them in two of the boats to carry aboard of the *Ark* one end of two stout ropes, the other ends of which had been securely fastened to a point on the bank of the river at the mouth of the coulée. These four men were to make their ends of the ropes fast to the house-boat, so that in floating down the river the moment she felt the strain of them the force of the current would necessarily bring her around against the shore on the same side of the river on which the outlaws intended to escape from her after the robbery was committed.

The remaining two, and these were the Kid and Scar Benson, would do the real hold-up act; that is, they were to leap aboard the boat, and, with their guns ready,

command silence of the one or two watchmen whom they would find on the deck. It was not concluded that there would be more than two on watch at that hour in the morning, when all who could do so would be sleeping.

The Kid believed that it could all be done so silently that the *Ark* would be stationed against the bank of the river, held there by the ropes above referred to, before the sleepers awakened or the guards were aroused, and he then looked for an easy victory over them all.

It must be understood that he now knew of whom the passengers aboard the *Ark* consisted.

He knew now that three of them were women, and that, therefore, not counting the Chinese cook, and he never thought to count him, there would be only five men to contend with, whereas there were six in his own party.

It is true that the Kid gave some thought to the presence there of the detective from the East who was called "Nick Carter," for he had heard something about Nick's reputation during his travels and had also read something about him.

But the Kid was one who never lost much time in calculating the odds that were opposed to him in anything that he attempted to do. His methods were always characterized by recklessness and dash and foolhardy bravery; always ready to shoot to kill himself, he figured that others were prepared to do the same; and he never went into an affair of this kind without taking these chances, and without thoroughly comprehending that he was as liable to be killed as any one else.

With all their preparations made, there was nothing then to do but await the arrival of the boat; but in order to make sure that she would not come upon them too suddenly, and that they would not be surprised, two of the men were sent half a mile up the river, where a good view could be obtained for quite a stretch, and where as she floated down it in the starlight they would be able to discover her before she got too close.

And so the hours of the night wore away while these outlaws awaited the coming of their prey.

It was two o'clock in the morning precisely when the two watchers rode into camp and reported that the boat was in sight; and within fifteen minutes after they arrived the outlaws were in readiness to make the attack as soon as she should appear around the slight bend in the river which was just above them, where the current would force her very close to the bank where the outlaws were waiting.

CHAPTER IV.

BOARDED BY PIRATES.

There was no moon that night; neither were there any clouds, and the starlight, as is usual in that section, was extremely brilliant and clear, so that it was easy to determine objects with considerable distinctness some distance away.

But the spot that Kid Curry had chosen for his attack had been selected with the eye of an expert, for just there the high banks and bluffs on every side of the coulée which approached the river made a sort of protection for the commencement of their operations, for while they cast no shadow upon the water, every one knows that on a starlit night it is difficult to see moving objects from a boat on the water against a shore that is almost black by contrast.

And then, again, as has been stated before, the current as it flowed around the slight bend just above there forced itself closely over to that shore, and the *Ark*, therefore, when it finally resumed its steady course down the river was less than a hundred feet from the bank whereon the outlaws were awaiting it.

They were all ready, and there was nothing to do but push off when the Kid gave the low word of command to do so; and each man had been so thoroughly instructed in the course he was to pursue that there was no necesssity for a spoken word beyond that.

If the reader has ever floated down a river on a barge or other craft which uses no power save that derived from the current itself, he will know that it is an almost invariable custom to tie up by night and to journey by daylight.

It might be said to be universally the custom where the course is unknown or the river is a strange one, or where there are likely to be snags and subterranean rocks to add to the dangers of the voyage.

But in the case of the voyage of the *Ark* as commanded by Major Corson, he announced that he knew every foot of that river for two or three hundred miles below them, and that the boat would need no care at all for that distance, for the reason that the current would keep her safely in deep water, and she would float as usual past all obstacles as would a chip cast upon the surface of the water.

Neverthelesss, upon retiring he had thought it best, it being the first night out, to leave both men on deck on the watch and ready with their poles to push off from the banks if they approached too near; and also because it was the first night out he had remained on deck himself and had succeeded in keeping Montague and Nick Carter with him until after one o'clock in the morning.

Even after they had retired he had remained some time longer, and therefore it is doubtful if the major had been sleeping more than an hour when the three boats manned by the outlaws put off from the bank of the river to surround and capture him.

The two men also who had been engaged as crew were drowsy; it being their first night out they had indulged themselves quite freely before they started, and now when the outlaw outfit put off from the bank to-

and them both were silent, where but a little while before they had been smoking and talking together, seated well forward where they could watch the current of the river ahead of them, and the direction the boat was taking.

It is certain that neither of them discovered the approach of the outlaws. It is true that no one knew or expected their appearance until these two men were suddenly apprised of the fact by several blows on their heads from the butts of revolvers, which sent them into unconsciousness much deeper than their sleep had produced.

And then the four other men whose business it was to handle the ropes, scrambled upon the deck, searched for and found the cleats where they could fasten the lines, and so without a shot being fired or without a sound being made that was sufficient to attract attention, the ropes were made fast and the two men who had been left on deck as a protection were knocked senseless and securely bound before they could offer any resistance, and in a moment the great boat feeling the strain of the ropes that were attached to the shore, half-halted, shuddered, and then began to swing swiftly around toward the high receding bank.

It so happened that the slight jar that was made when the ropes came taut and changed the course of the boat, roused Nick Carter from his sleep.

It is certain that he had no thought of danger or that anything of an untoward character had occurred when he half-raised himself in his bed and listened.

He could hear the swish of the water along the sides of the boat just as he had noticed it upon retiring, thinking at the time what a musical lullaby it made.

He wondered drowsily what had caused the slight jar, for he could detect nothing now to explain it, for as yet the boat was swinging, and, as far as he was concerned, there was no perceptible difference in the motion, and after wondering about it for a moment he dropped back upon the pillow, deciding in his own mind that the bottom of the boat had touched some shallow spot or that the craft had somehow come in contact with a floating log.

He was just composing himself to sleep again when there was a second jar followed by a scraping noise as the craft slid along against the bottom where it had touched it close to the shore, and then with something very like a jerk, the *Ark* came to a stop.

The detective knew that it was no part of their original plan to make a stop of that kind that night, and he started up from his bed and reached for his lamp to light it.

That done, he paused again and listened for a moment, wondering if he had better go out on the deck, or if it would be folly and needless interference for him to do so.

Presently he began to draw on his clothing, for having heard no sound whatever from the deck, he began to wonder if perhaps the boat had not gone ashore somewhere without the knowledge of the watchmen who might have fallen asleep.

The sides of the deck-house were built flush with the boat, and the door of the detective's stateroom did not open upon the deck, otherwise he would have stepped outside at once to ascertain the cause of the trouble.

As it was he was only a moment getting into his clothes and then to his amazement, just as he was about to step across his stateroom and open the door, some one approached it quickly from the opposite side and turned the key which he now remembered to have left there when he retired.

"Hello!" he called out. "Who is there? What is the matter?"

There was no reply, and after a moment he called again:

"Hello, I say! Who is there? What has happened?"

"Nothing at all has happened," said a gruff voice in reply; a voice which the detective did not recognize, but which he supposed might belong to one of the two members of the crew.

"What did you lock that door for?" he called out again.

Again there was no reply, and the detective, now thoroughly impatient, although not as yet angry or startled, exclaimed:

"Unlock that door, confound you! I want to come out."

There was just a moment of hesitation, and then the voice said in an entirely different tone:

"Wait just a moment, if you please, sir."

"This is mighty strange," thought the detective, and he crossed over to the chair where his watch was hanging and looking at the time, discovered that it lacked just ten minutes of three o'clock.

That done, he stepped back to the door again and turned the knob and then rattled it impatiently as he called out:

"I say, my man, are you there yet?"

"I sure am," was the somewhat muffled response, and even now it did not occur to the detective that the man outside was attempting to deceive him or attempting to disguise his voice, although he did regard it as a remarkable proceeding that his door should have been locked in that manner.

He waited another moment, and just as he had determined to make the fellow outside open the door or else to force it open himself, he was startled by hearing a slight and indistinct scream, evidently proceeding from the cabin occupied by one of the young ladies, and then as he leaped forward to open the door at all hazards to find out without any further delay what had happened, he heard the voice of Major Corson calling:

"Carter! I say, Carter! Where the dev——"

There was a sudden pause in the major's exclamation. There was a silence following it of perhaps a second, then the sound of muttered words in another voice, and then, just as the detective was about to answer, the major's voice came again:

"It's all right, Carter. It's all right; stay where you are."

"But what is the matter?" called Nick. "What is happening?"

Another slight hesitation, and then the major's voice again:

"Nothing has happened; nothing is the matter!"

"But why has my door been locked?" demanded the detective.

"Is it locked?" called back Corson.

"Yes; somebody locked it just now to keep me in here."

"All right. All right, Carter; stay where you are for the present. I'll let you out in a few minutes."

"But I insist upon knowing what has happened. What is going on out there?"

"Never mind, never mind, Carter, there's a good fellow; just stay where you are. Don't mind your door being locked. It's some kind of a game they're playing on the old chap. Crawl back into your bed and stay there until I call you again. Really, old chap, that's what I want you to do, don't you know."

Nick smiled at his own reflection in the mirror which he happened to notice just at that moment.

He remembered that he and Montague had left the major on the deck all alone with a bottle of Scotch whisky and a bottle of seltzer, and Nick concluded that the major had been hitting it up rather hard since then, and that this inexplicable occurrence was the consequence of it.

Never supposing for a moment that there was any danger to anybody afoot, least of all dreaming that the boat had been boarded by pirates or outlaws, and that a holdup was in progress, he threw himself back upon the bed again, but without removing his outer clothing that he had donned and also without extinguishing his light, but as he listened, lying there, he heard the tramping of feet up and down the deck several times: he heard the sound made by voices in subdued conversation, and he wondered drowsily, for he was very sleepy, what in the world could be going on at this time of the night which made it necessary even for the perpetration of a joke, or a supposed joke, for the major to have locked him in his room.

It might be natural for the reader to criticize the action of Nick Carter in this crisis, for it was a crisis as we know, but no feeling of insecurity came to him at all. He regarded the darkness as an adequate safeguard, and the sound of the major's voice, in reassuring him, had quieted every misgiving that he may have had; still, as the moments went on and on, he became more and more impatient, so at last he left the bed and tried the door again, when there had been a period of many minutes during which he had heard no sounds of any kind.

It was still locked, but Nick Carter's impatience had now reached the point where he was determined to open that door even at the risk of breaking it, and as it opened outward from the stateroom into the cabin, he turned the knob, pressed his knee against it, then his weight, and succeeded in forcing it with very little damage, to the door, damage which he knew could be very easily repaired.

As the door opened and he stepped into the main cabin of the craft, he stopped still in his tracks and partly repressed an exclamation of dismay because of the spectacle that confronted him.

It has been stated that the boat was a large one, and this cabin, upon which Nick entered now, was as spacious as the drawing-room of a city house; almost directly confronting Nick, half a dozen yards from him, was a deep, leather upholstered chair, and in this chair Major Corson was seated with his arms and legs firmly bound to it with ropes brought in from the decks, while another one had been used as a gag to prevent him from crying out; and he sat there utterly helpless, alike incapable of motion or sound.

He was the only individual in Nick Carter's sight when he stepped into the cabin, and the detective sprang forward at once and lost no time in releasing him.

The instant that Corson's bonds fell loose from him, and the gag was removed from his mouth, he leaped to his feet and for a moment or two lost himself and all sense of his surroundings or the presence of Nick Carter, in a tirade of voluminous oaths that would have done infinite credit to a Billingsgate Hooligan.

The detective interrupted him as quickly as he could.

"Corson!" he exclaimed, seizing the major by the wrist and twisting it so that it forced an exclamation of pain which effectually brought the man to himself. "If you don't tell me what's the matter, and what has happened aboard this boat, I'll do something to hurt you!"

"Matter!" cried Corson. "Tell you what has happened?" he shouted in his strongest military tones. "We've been boarded by pirates, that's what! We've been held up by outlaws, that's what's the matter; and the scoundrels have not only robbed me, Carter, but I believe, on my soul, they have carried off the women with them!"

CHAPTER V.

ONE NIGHT'S TRAGIC WORK.

The detective did not wait to secure further explanation from the major, for he saw that the man was so

nearly beside himself with rage and chagrin that it was impossible for him to speak or even to think coherently.

He left him standing in front of the chair where he had been a prisoner, still swearing and cursing the stars and everything in general, and ran to the door of the room which he knew had been assigned to the major's wife.

He rapped upon it first gently, then louder, and then believing that he heard a groan from the inside of the room, he opened the door.

It was all dark in there, but the detective struck a match, and by its light he saw that Mrs. Corson had been fastened to her bedstead by having a slip-noose drawn around her waist, and the cord of which it was a part fastened to the framework of the bed, while still another rope had been passed around the bed outside of the bedclothing, securely binding her; one of her own handkerchiefs had been stuffed into her mouth and tied around behind her head, thus effectually gagging her.

To cut the cords that bound her and to remove the gag was the work of a moment, whereupon she burst into a fit of hysterical weeping. Nick saw no prospect of getting any further information from her than he had succeeded in getting from her husband. But there was a door from this stateroom which communicated with the one adjoining it, the one which had been set aside for Alice Corson, and having lighted one of the lamps, Nick, without hesitation, passed through it to that room only to discover that it was unoccupied and that the major's daughter was no longer there. Still beyond that was another room where Lola Craddock slept, and Nick rapped loudly upon the door which communicated with it, but receiving no response.

He tried the door, only to find it locked, whereupon, without hesitation, he burst it open with his foot and entered.

This room too, was vacant. Lola Craddock was not there.

Realizing now that something terrible had really happened, and not doubting, after what he had seen, that the young ladies had been abducted, Nick rushed from the room to renew the search for some evidence of their presence or of the persons who had taken them away, and so he came presently to the room where Montague had slept and whom he had only just remembered as being one of the party.

The detective almost stumbled over him as he entered the room, for Montague was stretched full length upon the floor just within the door, and blood was flowing from a deep cut in the head where he had been struck evidently with the butt of a pistol. He was breathing, although unconscious, and Nick raised him and carried him into the main cabin, where he deposited him on one of the wide couches that were there. As he entered the room with his burden, Mrs. Corson appeared, and at the same moment the major seemed partly to come to himself, and to realize that cursing and swearing at the fate that had brought this misfortune upon them would do no good toward remedying it.

Calling their attention to the wounded man, Nick dashed outside upon the deck of the boat, where presently he came upon one of the boatmen who had been supposed to be on guard at the time the attack was made; and this fellow was lying stark dead near the place where he had been seated, a knife wound in his breast where the weapon had probably pierced his heart; the other watchman was missing entirely.

Nick thought for a moment that perhaps he had been murdered and thrown over the side into the water, but even as this explanation occurred to him, he remembered that just before they had gone aboard the *Ark* at the impromptu wharf the Saturday night before their start, he had noticed one of these boatmen talking with a stranger who had disappeared a moment after Nick came upon the scene, and now he looked at the dead man beside him to discover if he was the one whom he had seen talking with the stranger.

He was not, and so the detective felt that he had hit upon a beginning of the solution of the mystery in which they had all become so suddenly involved, and which was as yet, we must remember, all a mystery to the detective.

There remained now but one other person to account for aboard the craft, and Nick hastened to the galley beyond which was the room where the Chinese cook slept.

To his amazement he found the Celestial there perfectly well and absolutely unconscious of the happening of any event, for he was snoring peacefully in a natural sleep which was not assumed.

The detective left him there and hastened again to the cabin, to the major and his wife who were working together over the wounded Montague, who had not yet regained consciousness; but already Mrs. Corson had bandaged his injured head with strips torn from a sheet from one of the beds, and she was now engaged in applying such restoratives as she could find, so Nick drew the major to one side and questioned him.

"Major," he said, "if you will come with me and get into some of your clothing, and will then try to tell me intelligently what has happened and how it happened, I shall be infinitely obliged to you. As far as I can see we are tightly moored against the shore here in the darkness; at all events the boat is at a standstill, and there are two ropes that lead from one end of her to some place on the shore where they are made fast. I will go along with you, and you shall answer my questions while you are getting into your clothes."

"The very devil is to pay, Carter," said the major

thickly, for he was still hot with anger, and it was probably better for him that he was, for as yet he had not realized the full extent of the calamity that had befallen him in the abduction of his daughter and his niece.

"Who was it locked my door on me, major?" asked Nick.

"It was one of those infernal ruffians, who else?" cried the major.

"Why did you cry out to me that it was all right? That nothing had happened?"

The major grinned sheepishly.

"I guess you'd have done the same thing if you'd been in my place. One man held a gun at my temple and another was sticking the point of a knife about half an inch into me, whispering the answers that I was to make to you. You see, Carter, they caught me just as I came out of my stateroom. I suppose when the boat stopped it awakened me; anyhow I jumped out, and calling for you as I started for the door, they caught me at the same instant; then one of them lighted the lamp and you know the rest."

"Who were they and how many of them were there?" asked the detective.

"If you ask me who they were I tell you that I don't know; as for their number, I counted six all told."

"How did they get aboard the boat?"

"I have no more idea than you have."

"Did you see them carry off the two young ladies with them?"

"No, Carter, I didn't. The fact is that after they made me answer you as they wanted me to, they forced that gag into my mouth so I couldn't say any more; then they began to search the boat. Two of them went into my wife's room and I heard her try to scream, but they stopped her almost instantly. She will probably tell you about that. I think they must have gone from there to Alice's room; and I don't know anything more about what happened, save that two or three minutes later one of them came out to where I was seated and held a towel over my eyes so I couldn't see a thing."

"Go on," said Nick. "Go on; tell me everything you know."

"Well, you see, Carter, I didn't know anything about what was happening. I couldn't see and I couldn't speak, but I could hear, and once as I sat there while people were moving past me, I caught the notion somehow that my daughter was somewhere near; I think she must have been passing me at that moment. I think also that I heard a muttered sound that might have proceeded from her, and now I think that they had gagged her and that she was trying to speak or call to me, notwithstanding that fact."

"Without doubt," said Nick. "Have you any idea who they were?"

"None whatever, Carter."

"Have you any enemies around this neighborhood who would dare to attempt such a thing as this, out of revenge?"

"No, I am sure I have not."

"Do you know of the existence of any band of outlaws in this region now?"

"No; not for seven or eight years."

"About how far down the river from our starting-place do you think we are?"

"Between eighty and a hundred miles."

"That would bring us where do you think, major?"

"Somewhere about on the line between Choteau and Valley Counties, just before we get to Dawson County."

"Isn't that somewhere in the neighborhood of a place called Landusky?"

"Yes. If I am correct in my surmise, Landusky should be between twenty and thirty miles directly north of here."

"Isn't Landusky and the Little Rocky Mountains and the Four Buttes the neighborhood where Kid Curry used to hang out?"

"Yes, but Kid Curry is dead or out of the country. I have heard that he was dead and I have heard that he was in South America. Anyhow, he isn't around here any longer."

"But he used to have quite a gang, didn't he?"

"Oh, yes, I believe so."

"They had their headquarters somewhere in this neighborhood, didn't they?"

"Yes, I believe they did."

"Do you know where?"

"Not exactly."

"Do you know approximately where?"

"I think it was somewhere among the Little Rockies or the Four Buttes."

"Was the gang entirely broken up at the time he was captured?"

"I have always supposed that it was."

"I mean was the whole gang captured, or different members of it?"

"Oh, no. There were two or three of them captured; the rest got away."

"Then don't you think it is likely that many of them are still hanging around here?"

"It isn't unlikely."

"Have you ever heard any rumor that they were?"

"No, I have never heard a word about them."

"Do you know of any such characters at all who have visited your ranch at any time recently, who might have been attracted by the beauty of your daughter or your niece?"

"No, Carter, I don't know anything about it. The truth is, I am so dazed by what has happened that I don't know what I say, still less what I'm doing; all I know is that we have been held up and boarded and

moving exactly as if we were a mail-coach or an express-train instead of a floating house-boat on the Missouri River. I know that those men, whoever they were, must have known I had a considerable amount of money aboard this boat to invest on the way down the river, for the reason that the leather trunk that used to stand in that corner of this room is gone. The money that I had with me was all in that trunk, two hundred and fifty thousand dollars; but, Carter, I give you my solemn word of honor that I wouldn't mind the loss of that a bit, and at this moment I'd willingly put as much more with it to see those two girls safely back again aboard this boat."

"You'll have them back again, major, just as sure's you're a living man. Come now, and do what you can to aid your friend Montague, while I look about me a little more. I'll tell you this one thing before I leave you, major, and that is that there is no doubt in my mind at all but what this attack was planned some time ago, for I think that one of the men whom you engaged as a boatman was a confederate of the outlaws; as for the other one, he is dead, they murdered him; and as for your daughter and your niece whom the robbers have carried off, we must make up our minds to keep this boat moored right here until we have searched for them and found them and brought them back. As soon as it is light and we are able to see anything at all, I'll take the trail, and as I am more or less accustomed to that sort of thing, I can follow it. North of here somewhere, I can find ranches where there are honest men to aid me. Now of good cheer, if you can, and before we are many hours older we will take the trail of the outlaws."

CHAPTER VI.

NICK CARTER MAKES DEDUCTIONS.

The detective sought Mrs. Corson as soon as he parted with the major, and having drawn her to one side and persuaded her to swallow a glass of port wine which he procured for her, he said:

"Will you try to tell me just exactly what happened, Mrs. Corson, and how it happened, and in telling me will you endeavor to describe to me as nearly as possible the personal appearance of the men you saw, and also will you try to recall any details connected with their actions, their motions, or their mannerisms, no matter how trivial or unnecessary it may appear to be?"

"I will try," she said simply.

"Tell me then, first, what it was that awakened you?"

"I think it was the sound of my husband's voice when I heard him call to you across the cabin."

"What did you do then, Mrs. Corson?"

"There was a light burning in my room; I always leave one when I retire, although when the outlaws left me they put it out; but when I heard my husband call I seemed to realize at the same moment that the boat was still, and I remember thinking that something had happened—that perhaps we had run aground. It did not occur to me that there was any danger of any kind, so I got leisurely out of my bed and put on my slippers and wrapper."

"Yes," said Nick.

"I had just finished adjusting them and was on the point of leaving the room, and, indeed, had my hand stretched out to open the door, when it was opened for me from the opposite side and a total stranger stood there.

"You can imagine how frightened I was. For an instant I was speechless; then I realized that the man was tall and dark with some touches of gray hair over his temples. He had a very sinister-looking face, or as much of it as I could see, did, for a red bandanna handkerchief was tied across it just over the bridge of his nose, effectually concealing the lower part of his face, but his eyes were sinister and glittering and very black. He was tall and muscular and almost catlike in his movements. He had a deep and musical voice as I remember it, although it sounded muffled beneath the handkerchief which he wore."

"Go on," said Nick.

"As I said, I was partly clothed, having put on my wrapper and my slippers. Terrified for an instant by the appearance of the stranger in the doorway, I neglected to call out as I should have done, and only attempted to scream when it was too late, for the instant I did so he stepped forward and clapped one hand over my mouth forcing me back upon the bed, while with his other hand he thrust the muzzle of a revolver against my bosom. You can imagine how frightened I was."

"I do, madam."

"He told me that if I attempted to call out I would not do anybody any good, myself least of all, and I would only succeed in getting myself and all my friends killed, whereas, if I kept silent, nobody would be injured."

"And then?"

"Then he arranged the noose around my waist as when you found it after you discovered me. He commanded me to stretch out upon the bed and threw the clothing over me as you found it. That bit of rope which was tied around the bed and around me held me fast to it, was here in one corner of the room; it had been used to tie up a hamper which had been brought aboard late Saturday night, and then fearing, I suppose, that I would call out the moment he left me, he gagged me."

"Now tell me what else he did," said Nick. "I want to know about his attack upon the young ladies."

Mrs. Corson burst into tears, and for a few moments

she could not control her emotions, but Nick waited sympathetically and silently for her to recover sufficiently for her to proceed with her story.

"The man had fastened me down on the bed," she said, "in such a position that I could see very little of what was going on, but I knew that, after a moment, a second man came into the room. I think that my daughter had attempted to rush into my room once while the man was binding me, and seeing what was happening to me she went back and locked her door, but I don't know; I only know that one of the men went to the door and found it locked, and that he burst it open, and that I heard the crash of it when it was done.

"I heard my daughter utter one short cry of fright, and then the voice of one of the men, not the one who had bound me, commanded her to be silent. I heard him say: 'If you utter a sound that can be heard outside of this room, we'll cut your mother's throat. Get into your clothes as quick as you know how and tell the other young woman to do the same, for you two have got a long ride ahead of you to-night. If you aren't dressed in five minutes, we'll take you without your clothes.'

"I think, Mr. Carter, that I fainted away then, because I don't remember anything more until just before you came into the room and found me."

"I think," said Nick, "that it was quite enough to make you faint. The point that I wanted to determine, was whether or not it was a premeditated affair, their taking away the two young ladies with them, or whether they acted merely upon the impulse of the moment."

"What is your decision, Mr. Carter?"

"My opinion is that it was premeditated."

"You mean that they had planned it?"

"Yes."

"But why should they do such a thing?"

"There are a good many reasons, madam, why desperate men should undertake such a thing. It might be done for revenge against your husband, or you, or both of you. It might be done by a desperate lover who had been flaunted by one of the young ladies. It might be done to create a means of obtaining immunity for the crime that has been committed in the robbery of the money your husband had brought on board, for by retaining the young ladies and agreeing to return them safely to their homes on condition that there would be no complaint or prosecution, they would obtain immunity; or it might have been done with the hope of further reward to be obtained by demanding a heavy ransom for the return of the girls to you."

"This is not the day of bandits, nor the country for them," remarked Mrs. Corson quietly.

"No," responded Nick, smiling grimly, "nor have I ever before heard of piracy among the Rocky Mountains, but I don't think, Mrs. Corson, that we can ever work this case out to any logical end by acting upon precedent."

"You don't think, Mr. Carter, that my daughter and my niece are in immediate danger of personal injury?"

"No," said Nick slowly and deliberately. "If I did I would tell you so, plainly, but, under the circumstances, I don't think so."

"Will you tell me why you don't think so?"

"Mrs. Corson, if your husband were a poor man, or if even what had been taken from this boat in the shape of money and valuables covered all the resources that he had, I should say that the young ladies were in very great danger, but we must not forget that not only is your husband a very rich man, not only are his resources for obtaining money almost unlimited, but he is surrounded by friends who are also wealthy, and there can be little difficulty in his obtaining, for the asking, almost any sum of money he desires."

"I know," she said, nodding.

"For that reason, it is my opinion that these outlaws have taken Miss Alice and her cousin from you for two reasons, or rather for a double purpose."

"And they are what?" she asked.

"They are to force a promise of immunity from prosecution, for this act of outlawry, and also if they can succeed in getting safely to their retreat, for the purpose of demanding an enormous ransom for the return of the young ladies."

"And therefore, you argue that in the meantime they will be safe?"

"And I argue, madam, that they will be as safe and as securely guarded from harm as if they were still aboard this boat in your care, for you know that a ransom is never obtainable unless the person ransomed is returned uninjured."

"Heaven grant that you are correct, Mr. Carter, but it is a terrible thing for a mother to contemplate; to know that her beautiful daughter, scarce twenty years old, has fallen into the hands of outlaws and has been carried away to the mountains."

"I know, Mrs. Corson, it is quite true it is a terrible thing to contemplate; but there is another thing which you must remember."

"What is that, Mr. Carter?"

"I was just now discussing this matter with your husband, and we had occasion to refer to a famous outlaw who once infested this State, who was known as Kid Curry."

"Yes," she said, "I remember him; I saw him once."

"Then, madam, you will all the more readily understand the comparisons I am about to draw for your benefit."

"Yes," she said.

"I suppose, Mrs. Corson, that Kid Curry, take him all around, the good and the bad, the treacherous and the

murder as that is in him, take him from the bottom up, and the top down, I don't suppose there was a more utterly fearless man alive than he. He would not hesitate to attack an express-train on the U. P. road single-handed; to hold it up and to pass through the cars and to rob the passengers without assistance. He would not hesitate, if there was some reason for him to do it, to ride straight into any stronghold guarded by unnumbered men and take the chances of finding his way out. If a sheriff's posse took after him I am sure Kid Curry would have fought to the last gasp, until he was overpowered or killed without ever counting the consequences, but there is one thing that I can mention, Mrs. Corson, that even Kid Curry would have been afraid if it had ever occurred to him to commit that crime."

"What can it be, Mr. Carter?"

"Even Kid Curry would have been afraid to face the consequences of his act if he had ever dared to abduct and wrong a young woman like your daughter or your niece within the boundaries of this State of Montana. He would know that every man in this State would not only start out red hot upon his track, but would follow him to the ends of the earth until they captured him and killed him for the commission of such a crime, and he knew that once upon his track they would never once rest until he was caught and had paid the penalty."

"I believe, Mr. Carter, that you are right."

"I know I am right, Mrs. Corson. The chivalry of the West, while rough and unpolished, crude and sometimes unrecognized, is the greatest and the noblest that has ever been known in the world, where a woman is concerned. There is no place in all the world where a young woman is so safe and so well guarded, and all the while so perfectly free and fearless, as she is within the borders of the great State of Montana."

"Mr. Carter, you give me great hope."

"I trust so, Mrs. Corson. See, if you will turn and look out of the window, you will discover that the dawn is coming. We are moored by the ropes the outlaws tied to us, close against the bank of the river. Your husband tells me he believes we are somewhere near the border of Valley and Dawson Counties; if that is so, to the north of us a little distance, or you would call it a little distance in this country, twenty or thirty miles away, is the town of Landusky, and there in Landusky are at least three, and I think five, men whom I know well. I hope that the trail of the outlaws will lead me toward that place, for I know, madam, that if I can but secure the services of the three Coburn boys, Wallace and Bill and Bob, and of Jim Thornhill and Alec Black, that with their aid it won't take long for us to track those outlaws down, whoever they may be, and rescue your daughter and your niece from them. As soon as it is daylight, I shall make the start."

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRAIL TO THE MOUNTAINS.

When the sun rose that morning, Nick Carter was standing far forward at the bow of the house-boat, if a vessel that is almost square in shape could be said to have a bow.

Beside him stood Major Corson, while at a little distance away, seated upon a camp-stool, was the major's wife, sad-eyed and with drawn face, but outwardly brave and confident concerning the outcome of their misfortune. Leaning weakly against the deck-house near them was James Montague, with his head bandaged and his face as pale as a corpse, for although he had recovered full possession of his senses, and it was known that the wound he had received was not a serious one, still he had lost considerable blood and almost all of his British self-assurance.

From the direction of the galley could be heard the sound of rattling dishes, and the odor of breakfast, in preparation, came to their nostrils.

The morning was as perfect as a morning in June could be, but the scene they encountered from the deck of the *Ark* was desolate and forbidding, indeed.

Above them, a little way, was the bend in the river before described, and below them the ribbon of water stretched away for a mile at least in a straight line with high banks frowning on either side, and here and there jutting rocks to add to the desolation of the scene.

Immediately beside them and just above where the boat was so securely moored, was the mouth of the coulée where the outlaws had waited before making their attack, and drawn up on the shore were two of the small craft they had used, while the other one had probably been set adrift.

Nowhere was there a sign of life near them that could be seen.

It was the moment for which the detective had been waiting, and he had been employing the intervening time in perfecting his plans for taking up the trail, the result of it being that he had decided to leave the major, with his wife and guest, and the Chinaman, aboard the boat, while he should go himself alone into the interior, following upon the trail of the outlaws if he could find it, and depending entirely upon fortunate circumstances to find some one to help him as well as some means of procuring a horse.

He had decided upon this course for several reasons, chief among them being the time it would save in the effort at rescue of the two young ladies; for if he undertook to return to the ranch for assistance, the time would be so long before he could secure it, and return to where the attack had been made, that the trail, if there was any, would be obliterated, to say nothing of the fact that the outlaws would have ample opportunity to es-

cape to such a distance that it would be almost hopeless to pursue them.

It would seem almost foolhardy to the intelligence of a layman that Nick Carter should even contemplate making such an expedition alone.

He knew already, from what the major had told him, that there were at least six men in the outlaw outfit, and he had no means of guessing how many more there might be who waited ashore while the others boarded the boat.

He was only waiting now for the Chinaman to announce that the morning meal was ready to eat his breakfast and depart, his determination being to follow the trail until he was satisfied that it went in more or less of a straight line in some direction and then to strike off at once for Landusky, where, as we all know, he had acquaintances upon whose assistance he could depend; and he had already discussed the matter with the others on the barge, so that they had agreed to wait until the detective could send assistance to them from Landusky, which he meant to do the moment he arrived there.

His problems, however—that is, the beginning of them—were solved for him with the rising of the sun, for within a very few minutes after it, two horsemen rode down through th coulée to the shore of the river, and Nick was naturally greatly elated when he discovered that the foremost of the two was his old acquaintance, Bob Coburn, and that the other was no less a personage than fire-eating Jim Thornhill.

Instantly the detective leaped to his feet and waved his hand toward them, following the gesture by shouting out:

"Hello, Bob! Hello, Jim! You are the most welcome persons I could have seen this morning!"

In a moment the detective had lowered the house-boat's dinghy.

The two men tethered their horses in the coulée and returned to the house-boat with the detective, where they were quickly made acquainted with all that had happened, and it was Thornhill who supplied the bit of information that was lacking to explain that mysterious night attack.

He explained that Kid Curry was, indeed, again in the country, and told in detail how his suspicions and Bob's had been aroused; first by discovering the strangers talking together in the saloon at Landusky; and how he had later traced the men to the house and to the room where they held their meeting that night, where he had arrived only in time to know that some devilry was afoot connected with an attack on the house-boat upon which the major and his friends intended to travel down the river.

He had not been able to overhear sufficient of their plans that night to know exactly what was to be done, and when he had sought Bob Coburn in the morning to tell him about it, it was only to discover that Coburn had gone back to Circle C over at Dry Beaver Creek, and he was thus compelled to work alone, for it so happened that there was no one left in Landusky for him to appeal to, and in whom he could feel entire confidence.

He had hesitated to disclose the fact of Kid Curry's return for the reason that he knew that formerly the Kid had had so many friends around that region that in all probability if Thornhill talked about what he knew, one of these friends would hear of it and take the news to the Kid himself.

But he had ridden post-haste back to his own ranch; had sent one of his men to Corson's to warn the major and his party of what had been planned against them, and then had gone after the Coburn boys, determined to get them to make the attack or to be present when it was made and to offer their assistance to the people on the boat.

Fate had decreed that not one of his plans should carry as he had intended. The man he had sent to Corson's to convey the warning had not returned, and it was certain now that he had not carried the message as intended; at Circle C, two of the Coburn brothers, Wallace and Bill, were absent and had taken so many of their outfit with them that no more men could be spared from the ranch.

However, Bob and Jim had figured it out that together they were worth about half a dozen outlaws anyhow, and they had started out at once to patrol the river above there, to watch for the house-boat, intending to board it on its way down and thus to be present with the major and his friends when they were attacked.

But they had somehow miscalculated the speed with which the boat was traveling, and at all events she had passed them unseen.

They had received this intelligence from a cowboy they had encountered, and were riding down the river cutting off the bends in the short cuts, when they came to the coulée and found where she had been moored so dexterously to the shore.

Also they had discovered the trail of the outlaws up the coulée, and they were ready to take it at any moment.

Mrs. Corson had some misgivings about remaining aboard the *Ark*, fearing a second attack, and the Englishman, weak as he was, at first determined to accompany the hunters in their search for the outlaws; but all these objections were speedily overcome, and the major and his wife were assured that two or three men would be sent to them at once and would arrive before sundown, and so within an hour after Bob and Thornhill appeared upon the scene, Nick left the boat

with them, and the three men started away upon the trail together.

There were only two horses between the three of them and those two were about worn out, having been traveling almost constantly, and with very few intervals of rest, for upward of twenty-four hours, but the three men took turns one by one in running beside the horses with a hand clinging to the cinch or girth to help them along.

"There's a sheep-herder about six miles above here, Nick," said Thornhill, "who, for a wonder, happens to have a pretty good horse. We'll draft that into our service until we get where we can procure some fresh ones."

We need not particularly consider the details of that first day's trailing; it is sufficient to explain that early in the afternoon they succeeded in finding the fresh horses they desired, and were now hot upon the trail of the outlaws whose course had been laid directly toward the Little Rocky Mountains, about midway between Spring and Beauchamp Creeks.

At the place where they secured the fresh horses, half a dozen men had volunteered to accompany them on the trail, but after a short consultation together, they had declined assistance because the detective had already formulated a plan in his mind by which he hoped to overtake and surprise the outlaws without giving them warning of their approach.

From the point where they left the Missouri River, to the actual base of the Little Rockies when they arrived there, was between thirty-five and forty miles, and it was nightfall when they did reach them, because of the fact that they had been obliged to use worn-out horses during the fore part of the day, and with two horses between three men at that, and some time had been lost in changing for fresh horses in the middle of the afternoon.

The trail they had followed would not have been visible to less practised eyes than those of these two ranchmen, but to them it was as plain almost as a highway, and as soon as there were fresh horses under them, they covered it with exceeding rapidity, determined to arrive at the base of the mountains before nightfall in order to discover before it was dark the coulée through which the outlaws had decided to pass.

This they accomplished, as we know, and realizing that the following day would be an important one in their pursuit, they dismounted and prepared themselves to spend the night where they were, in order that horses and men might be fresh for the chase in the morning.

"It is my opinion," said Coburn, when he had lighted his pipe after their frugal supper, "that the Kid and his outfit are making for Mount Garfield, for I've always known that he had his principal retreat up there."

"I thought so, too," said Thornhill in reply, "but I don't hardly think he's heading that way now. It looks to me as if he was bound straight through the mountains for the Fort Belknap Reservation."

"Why?" asked Nick.

"Well," continued Thornhill, "I don't think he's heading for Mount Garfield, because if he was it would be a sight easier for him to have swung off to the westward and followed up the course of Cow Creek, which would have taken him almost to the base of the mountain."

"That's where yuh're off, Jim; yuh ain't on to the Kid's curves yet."

"Possibly not, Bob."

"I know something about the Kid and his methods," continued Coburn, "and it's my opinion if he was making for the reservation he'd a gone around by Cow Creek and obliterated his trail when he turned again toward the northeast; and for the same reason that he isn't headed for that place, he has followed up that coulée where he will strike through Dead Man's Pass, and then back-trail it for a ways among the rocks and so head out for Garfield. Yuh see, Jim, he knows he will be followed sooner or later, and he knows pretty near right who will do the following."

"I have an idea, boys," said the detective, who had quietly awaited this expression of opinion; "I have not mentioned it before because I have serious doubts even now whether it will meet with your approval, but I'm going to suggest it all the same."

"Let 'er go, Nick," said Thornhill.

"Isn't it true," asked Nick, "that the Kid used to be mighty friendly with some of the Indians on that reservation?"

Both the ranchmen nodded in reply, and Coburn said:

"Oh, yes, Carter; he was always hand in glove with the Indians, all right."

"Well, I've been thinking," said the detective, "that it would be a splendid idea if we had the materials at hand to fix ourselves up as Indians and to exchange these horses for ponies, if possible. You see," he continued rapidly, holding up one hand to enjoin silence, "if we did that and then continued on their trail without the outward appearance of following it, we'd be much more likely to overtake them without molestation, before we did so. I, too, know something about Kid Curry and his methods, although my only acquaintance with him comes from what I have read and heard about him; not from personal experience. Still I should say it would be like him to keep two or three of his men pretty well back on his trail for the sake of discovering who and what are following him, and to ambush us if it should be possible to do so. As there are only three of us, that would be a mighty likely thing for him to do, whereas if we were disguised as Indians and had two or three bucks along with us to carry out the deception, they would either pay no attention to us at all and not venture to let us know that they were near,

or they would ride forward to question the Indians, thus permitting us to capture whoever had been sent back on the trail, which would not only weaken their outfit just that much, but would also provide us with the means of securing the very information we need."

"It sure is a good idea!" exclaimed Coburn, slapping his thigh exultingly, "and I happen to know just how it can be carried out. Roll yuhselves in yuhr blankets, boys, and in the morning we'll carry out Carter's idea and some more too."

CHAPTER VIII.

SHOT AT FROM AMBUSH.

The gray dawn found our three friends awake and their frugal breakfast disposed of.

It is a surprising thing how few words will be spoken between men such as these were, when upon an expedition like this one, for without words and by common consent, it had been decided, the preceding evening, that Bob Coburn was to take the lead in the morning and that they were to follow him without question.

The trail led them plainly through the coulée which developed, as they advanced, into a regular cañon which carried them deeper and deeper into the mountains, although they constantly ascended toward the divide which Coburn had referred to as Dead Man's Pass.

Here at the summit of it the trail was lost, and here Coburn pulled in his horse, at the same time indicating to the others to do the same, and throwing one leg over the pommel of his saddle, he leisurely rolled himself a cigarette, saying as he did so:

"Now, Nick, my remarks are addressed to yuh, but Jim here can put in at any time he sees fit, to offer an amendment, to make a kick, or to tell me I don't know what I'm talking about. You see, Nick, he knows just as much about this here business as I do, and mebbe a little more, so if I happen to go wrong in setting out this trail for us to follow, Jim will correct me all right."

"Sure!" said Jim, grinning, "Fire away, Bob."

"Well, it's like this," continued Coburn, "here we are plumb on the divide, and we know to a dead certainty that the Kid and his outfit came to this here spot together. We don't know to any dead certainty which direction they took from here. If they hit the trail to the Belknap Reservation, it would mean, according to my ideas, that they are pointing for the sky-line and mean to go over into Canada; possibly up toward the White Mud River and from there on to Big Lake, and if they have started out with any such plan as that in their minds, they've gone that-away," and he pointed with his gun a little to the east of north of where they were standing.

"But it, as I believe, they're hitting for Garfield Mountain, they have followed off that-away to the westward, and we ought to get up with them, if we know just where they have gone, by nightfall."

"I guess that's just about what they've done," said Thornhill.

"I guess so too, Jim," continued Bob, "but what I want yuh to do is this: I want yuh and Nick to follow that supposed trail to the westward and over toward Garfield which ain't more than twenty or twenty-five miles from here, while I intend to strike down a little to the northeast to where I happen to know there's a small bunch uh Indians having summer camp. They ain't more than six miles from here and I can find them."

"Go on," said Nick, "what more, Bob?"

"Well, yuh fellers mooch along down that supposed trail, and when yuh get out uh that coulée yuh'll follow presently, if yuh haven't already struck, the Kid's trail, Thornhill will be able to find it somewhere in the foot-hills, for it's there, and no matter whether yuh find it or not, I'll meet yuh a little before sundown at the Old Hen and Chickens, which, for yuhr information, Nick, I'll explain is a group uh small buttes about six or seven miles from here in the direction yuh are to follow. Yuh're to wait for me there anyhow, whether yuh find a trail or not, for if yuh don't find one I will, and I'll either come for yuh in person or I'll send one uh the young bucks I'll find, for you."

They parted then, and Nick and Thornhill picked their way cautiously down the rocky slopes, and thus through a coulée which they found which took them gradually toward the base of the mountain; but not once, as they proceeded, did they see signs of any trail, so that at last, three hours later, when they came out upon the cluster of small buttes known as the Hen and Chickens, both men had decided that the Kid and his outfit had taken the other direction.

However, Thornhill having directed Nick to dismount and wait for him, started out to search the mouths of several of the coulées that were near there, in the hope of discovering the trail, and when Nick would have gone in the opposite direction for the sake of assisting him in the search, Thornhill told him, "No." That he knew a way around that would cover the ground just as well and in much less time.

Left by himself, the detective staked out his horse where there was some sweet grass, and then espying a rocky ledge near the top of one of the small buttes or knobs near him, he made his way around and thus up it by a winding course, until at last he stood like a sentinel upon the very summit of the rock a hundred feet above the plain.

He had raised himself to a standing position and was turning slowly around and around studying the country in every direction from where he stood, when from a point almost directly beneath him, he heard the crack

of a Winchester and his hat lowered from his head as if it had been knocked off by the blow of a hand, and was scurrying away on the wings of the wind.

The detective knew that a bullet had come dangerously close to him, but it was impossible for him to determine, in that instant, from what direction it had come.

To attempt to climb back down by the way he had ascended would be to invite other shots from that unknown source, any one of which might prove fatal.

He knew that he presented a perfect target where he stood and almost at the instant that the hat was knocked from his head he leaped forward into space, down a sheer fall of about twenty feet, to a ledge that was directly below him, and without pausing there he leaped again and yet again, so that within the space of time that one would consume in counting ten, he was again at the bottom of the bluff.

During this descent, swiftly as it was accomplished, two more shots were fired at him, neither of which took effect, but they served to inform him where the concealed marksman was in hiding, and the detective had no sooner picked himself up from making the last leap than he started forward on a swift run toward the cluster of rocks from behind which the smoke of the discharges was eddying swiftly upward.

As he ran forward, another bullet tore through the shoulder of his coat without, however, touching his body, and as he leaped past the rocks in search of the would-be assassin, he came full tilt upon the man who had fired at him.

There was no opportunity for either of them to make use of their weapons, and in another instant they were rolling over and over down the declivity beside the rocks toward the base of them.

But even as they reached the bottom, and while Nick was struggling to obtain a hold upon the other man's throat, he heard an exclamation in the voice of Jim Thornhill which was followed by the dull thud of a blow, and the man with whom he was struggling straightened out swiftly upon his back, silent and motionless.

Thornhill had heard the shots fired, and being quite near the spot had run to the assistance of the detective, and he had arrived just in time to deliver a telling blow on the cranium of Nick's assailant, with the result that the man was stretched out senseless before them; and then it needed only a glance to inform Nick Carter that this man was none other than the deck-hand who had escaped from the boat with the outlaws.

They didn't think it worth while to bind the fellow, but they sat themselves beside him while they awaited his return to consciousness.

When at last he opened his eyes he looked from one to the other of the stern-faced men who confronted him, evidently and astonishing affrightedly, for he knew that he could expect very little mercy from those men who had trailed him, especially when he discovered that one of them had been a passenger on the boat, and therefore knew of his own traitorous act.

"Well," said the detective, speaking quietly and with a slow smile, that for some reason made the prisoner shudder, as Nick intended it should do, "we have come up with you at last. If you had been a little better marksman, my man, I wouldn't be here to question you now."

The man preserved a sullen silence, making no response.

"Where and when did you leave Kid Curry?" demanded the detective sternly.

"Ain't seen no Kid Curry, mister," was the sullen reply; "he's somewhere in South America."

The detective slowly drew his revolver from his belt and raised the hammer, and then even more quietly than before, he repeated the question:

"When and where did you leave Kid Curry?"

"I ain't seen none of 'em since sunrise this morning, if that's what you mean," growled the fellow.

"Where were you when they left you?"

"Right here where I am now, obeying orders."

"So I suppose it was your orders to wait till we came up with you, eh?"

"Yes, if you did come up with me; that is, if you were smart enough to turn this way instead of going on toward the reservation."

"How many are there in that party, not counting yourself and the two prisoners they have taken?"

"Six."

"Who are they? I want you to tell me the names of every one of them."

"Well, there's Kid Curry, Scar Benson, Jew Jake, and a feller called Blue Peter, from over in Idaho, and two other gazaboes from Wyoming that they call Shorty and Ike. If they've got any other names I don't know 'em."

"They have got the two young ladies with them, haven't they?"

"They sure have, mister, and fools they was for taking them, say I."

"I guess you're right about that, my man. Have those two girls been treated decently since they were taken from the boat?"

"Well, mister, I don't know exactly what you mean by that, but they ain't been hurt none. They're like a couple of wildcat's kittens, them two are. Regular little spitfires. During the first part of the journey when we trailed out from the river, they had to ride double with the Kid and Scar, but in the morning the Kid found them a couple of horses, and with the exception that they're tied to the saddles and each one of them has got a rope around her waist which the Kid and Scar are

hanging on to, they're just as comfortable as any of the rest of the party."

"And now," said the detective, toying with the revolver meaningly, "I want you to tell me, and tell me truly, what place the Kid and his outfit are making for."

"I'd tell you if I knew, Mr. Carter, but I don't know, and that's true, so help me."

"They're heading for Garfield Mountain, aren't they?"

"Yes; I've heard that much."

"Has any mention been made of going farther than that?"

"Not a word, mister."

"Has any mention been made between them of a place of hiding which the Kid knows somewhere on Garfield Mountain?"

"I can tell you what I heard him say if that'll do you any good."

"Very well; tell me."

"Well, it's this way; when we stopped up above there on the summit of the divide, Sear and Jew Jake were for heading for the reservation, their idea being to go on through it and cross the border into Canada, and they come pretty near having a mutiny then and there, but the Kid finally says to 'em that he knows a place over in the big mountain—which is Garfield—where all the cowboys in Montana couldn't find 'em if they tried, and where a thousand men couldn't drive 'em out, and he went on to say, mister, that he had the place stocked up good and plenty with grub to eat, and that there's a big spring of water right there, big enough to run a ranch."

"Did he say what part of the mountain?"

"He didn't."

"Did he say when he would be likely to arrive there?"

"About sundown to-night, he said. I knew if you didn't come up to me by four o'clock, I was to hit the trail after 'em, and he was to leave one of the outfit back a little to guide me in. That's all I know."

"Do you know why the girls were stolen away from the boat?"

The fellow nodded, then grinned, and then shuddered with a sudden feeling of fear when he caught the direct gaze of the detective.

"I reckon it was for ransom, mister," he said moodily, "and that's all I know about it!"

The detective was silent for a moment, thinking deeply, and then just as he was about to renew his questioning, Thornhill leaped to his feet, at the same time pulling his gun, and wheeling to face the direction from which they had ascended.

But as he did so, his features expanded into a smile, and then he exclaimed to the detective:

"It's cowboy Lee, I see!"

Looking in the direction that Thornhill had indicated, the detective saw what appeared to be four Indian bucks riding out of the coulée into full view, and the foremost of them waved his hand and shouted in unmistakable Montanan language:

"I found 'em, boys, before I got half-way there, and now if we don't come up with the Kid and his outfit before dark to-night I'll turn sheep-herder for the rest of my life!"

The man, of course, was Bob Coburn.

CHAPTER IX.

NICK CARTER'S TEST OF STRENGTH.

It was yet early in the day, as the reader will remember.

Bob Coburn had been so fortunate as to run upon the small party of Indians before he had gone very far after leaving his friends at the top of the ridge, and because he had always been uniformly kind to the Indians around that neighborhood, they were ever his friends, and always ready to render him any assistance he might ask for.

It happened that one among their number was a young chief who had an especial liking for the Coburn brothers, and who had often visited Circle C ranch, and he listened solemnly to the story that Bob Coburn had to tell him, grunting his approval when the latter had finished, by asking for their assistance in trailing the outlaws, and in capturing them later on if that were possible.

And now that the party were together again and that there were three Indians to assist them, one of whom was the young chief, Grey Feather, it was decided that the previous idea of disguising themselves as Indians should be abandoned inasmuch as it was no longer necessary.

Grey Feather volunteered personally to go ahead of them and act as scout for the expedition.

"The trail that Kid Curry and the others will leave, will be as plain as a turnpike to my friend and brother, Grey Feather," Bob told Nick. "He will follow it with one of his bucks, while we mooch along behind with nothing to do but to keep up with him; and, besides, Grey Feather says he knows already the place for which the Kid is heading."

"Good!" said the detective.

"He also says," continued Coburn, "that if the Kid once gets there safely, that all the men in the State couldn't drive him out until he is ready to come. In other words, that indicates that unless we can head off the Kid before he reaches his place on the mountain, he will be in a position to make such terms with us as he chooses."

"I understand," said the detective, nodding grimly "but you speak, Bob, as if you thought there was some chance of our getting there first—heading him off, you put it."

"Grey Feather says there is a chance of doing that. He thinks he can do it."

"Does he speak English, Bob?"

"Almost as well as you do."

The detective turned to the young Indian, who could not have been more than twenty years old, and he said to him:

"My friend tells me that my brother, Grey Feather, believes he can get to the mountain ahead of the men who have stolen the women. Is it so?"

The chief grunted an assent; and then in his solemn manner he said:

"But my white brothers will have to travel like the wind, to do so. They will abandon the horses and take the trail on foot, and must cross mountains and ravines."

"Where would we leave the horses?" asked the detective.

"At the base of the mountain. Two hours from here."

"You mean, do you not, that you can lead us by a shorter route across the mountain, in order to get ahead of the outlaws?"

"Yes. I could do it; my braves can do it, but my white brothers——?" The Indian stopped and shrugged his shoulders significantly, as if he did not deem it possible for all of them to accomplish it.

"Was it the plan of my red brother, the Grey Feather, that he should go ahead with one of his braves, leaving the others to follow?"

The Indian nodded an affirmative.

"Will my red brother consent to leave his braves with me two friends and permit me to go with him instead of the brave he would have taken?"

The chief turned his eyes calmly, but searchingly, upon the detective and studied him for a full minute, with an air of confident superiority; then he said:

"It is well. If my white brother is ready we will start now."

"Your white brother is ready, all right," responded Nick instantly.

"I say, Nick," exclaimed Thornhill, "what are you going to do with this fellow?" And he pointed toward the crouching figure of their prisoner.

"We'll find a convenient limb back there among the hills," said Coburn, before Nick could reply. "We'll hang him to it and leave him there as a warning to the others if any of them happen to return this way."

"Yes," said Nick. "If you'll favor me, boys, we will have no hangings on our consciences."

"Then what are you going to do with him?" demanded Coburn.

"We can't be bothered by taking him with us," said Thornhill.

"We'll turn him loose and let him go," replied the detective.

"What! Turn him loose?" cried Coburn. "Not on your life. He's a cattle-rustler, a horse-thief, and an abductor of women, to say nothing of his having turned traitor aboard that boat. We'll string him up, that's what we'll do."

"Look here, men," whined the prisoner, who had listened intently to the conversation, "if you'll do as the tenderfoot says and turn me loose, I'll not only tell you all I know, but I will get out of the State as soon as I can and never come back to it."

"Talk quick, then," ordered Thornhill, who saw that Nick would not stand for the idea of a lynching.

"Well, all I know ain't much. I told most all of it a while ago when you were questioning me; but there is a little more."

"Out with it then. What is it?"

"I came down here from the falls. I was stayin' up there when one day I ran across the Kid. I used to know him years ago, and was once a member of his gang for a little while."

"Well?" said Nick.

"When I met up with him he had just heard of the house-boat business, and I figured that maybe I could get myself taken on as one of the hands. It was agreed between the Kid and me that if I could, I was to get something extra for it. And then, when the time came for him to get aboard the boat to rob it, I was to render him all the assistance I could."

"He cert oughter be strung up 'thout waitin' tuh hear any more!" muttered Coburn; but the outlaw continued:

"But I want you to know right now that I didn't take no part in the affair at all. I was a-settin' there beside my partner on the deck when we both got a rap from behind, the same medicine being dealt out to both of us. When I came to my senses again, I saw that one of the Kid's outfit had stuck a knife into my partner, and I was ordered to get ashore and make ready to go with them. I didn't have no hand in the abduction of the wimmin, and I didn't know nothin' about it till they was brought ashore, either."

"Go on. What more?" demanded the detective. "All this doesn't interest us in the least. What we want to know about is the Kid's plans for the future."

"Well, all I know is that he intends to lie low in his hiding-place at Garfield Mountain until he can make a safe getaway, and then he's going to light out with the girls. At first he was only for demanding a ransom for 'em, but when he and Benson saw how purty they are—well, the Kid says he's going to marry one uh them and afterward make the major pony up handsome, too; and he's going to give the other one to Scar Benson. But I heard him say that he was going to do it all anyway, so's he be a sure son-in-law uh the major. I suppose that Injun there knows more about the Kid's hiding-place in the mountains than I do, from what I've heard

him say already; all I know is what I've told you—that it is some safe place from which the Kid don't think you can root him out."

"Is that all?"

"That's all I know; and now if you'll let me go, I'll promise to light out of the State for good and all—and some more, too."

Nick Carter stepped forward and cut the bonds which held the man. He had previously been deprived of all his weapons; and having released him, the detective said:

"Now you hit the trail for the sky-line, and do it quick! The Great Northern Railroad is only about forty miles to the north of here. You make for it, and when you hit it, start toward the east. Go!"

"Yes," said Coburn; "and don't you ever show your mug inside the State uh Montana again, cos if yuh do, yuh'll be shot on sight, or if you are captured, yuh'll be strung up tuh the first thing that's stout enough and high enough tuh hold yuh. Git!"

The man started at a swift walk toward the north, but he had not gone a dozen paces before Coburn sent a bullet whizzing past his ears.

"I ain't a-hurtin' him none," he said to Nick, who stepped forward quickly. "I'm jest acceleratin' his pace a mite. Clip a piece off'n that left ear uh his'n, Jim, while I do the same for the right one. That's the idea."

The outlaw uttered a yell of fright and started on a run, while the two ranchmen sent several bullets uncomfortably close to his head, laughing while they did it, and even bringing smiles to the stolid faces of the Indians.

But as soon as he was gone, the chief, Grey Feather, stepped quickly to his pony and leaped upon its back; and then, without even a glance toward Nick to indicate that he expected him to follow, he rode off swiftly toward the plain and the tall mountain that loomed before them in the distance.

Nick was not slow to follow. In an instant he was also in the saddle, and, spurring his horse, he presently rode beside the Indian, who neither turned his head nor manifested by any other visible sign that he was aware of the presence near him of the detective.

Mile after mile was covered at a swinging lope, the Indian always with his eyes fixed keenly and steadily upon the trail before him, and never uttering a word; and he did not speak to the detective at all until they arrived at the slope of the mountain they sought.

Here he came to a halt for a moment, and with an expression that was suggestive of a smile, he said:

"Will my white brother follow me over the difficult trail?"

"I certainly will," replied Nick, smiling; "and I will be eternally grateful to you, chief, for leading me, too."

"One, two miles farther we must leave the h[illegible] take care of themselves."

"Yes."

"Then there are many hours of traveling on foot."

"Yes."

"Over mountainous trails, across coulées, gulches, and cañons, through brush that is almost impenetrable—it is a difficult journey for my white brother to undertake, for he is not accustomed to the rough trails of the mountains."

"That is true enough, Grey Feather, but all the same I will agree to keep up with you, and to hold out, too, no matter how fast, or how far, you go."

The Indian looked Nick over carefully; and then, with discriminating intelligence, he remarked:

"My white brother is a strong man."

"Yes," replied Nick. "Try me. Put out your two hands and put the palms of them together, so. That is right. Now"—Nick closed his right hand around the Indian's wrists, holding them tightly together—"pull your hands away from me if you can."

The Indian smiled indulgently, and then he made the effort. For a moment he looked dazed and surprised when he found that he could not tear his wrists away from the detective's grasp when they were held only with one hand. He scowled, and made a second effort, but again it was in vain, and he made a third effort.

"Ugh!" he said, then, relaxing his muscles, and permitting himself to smile, "my white brother is heap strong. It is well. It is good. My white brother can follow where Grey Feather leads. Look! We will cross the mountain; we will cut off much of the distance the robber chief has to travel. At the setting of the sun we will arrive at his teepees in the mountain. We will arrive there before he does, and we will be awaiting him when he gets there. And then, when the robber comes, my white brother shall be chief, and Grey Feather will obey him and do his bidding. It is well. Come!"

CHAPTER X.

THE OUTLAWS' MOUNTAIN RETREAT.

The afternoon was well advanced—it wanted less than an hour of sundown when the detective and his Indian guide came out upon a ledge of rocks that overlooked a cuplike valley in the heart of the mountain; and the Indian stood beside Nick, and silently pointed downward a log cabin and a stockade corral, which stood almost in the center of the space.

The valley—if it could be called such—was not more than three or four acres in extent, and it was surrounded on every side by high and towering cliffs, which arose almost perpendicularly hundreds of feet into the air.

The face of the cliffs were almost smooth, and only

in one place could the detective distinguish anything which looked like a pass leading into the rock-locked valley; and that was apparently merely a narrow fissure, not wide enough at the bottom for two men to pass along it side by side. Nick calculated that the distance from where they stood, or, indeed, from any point along the tops of the cliffs to the surface of the valley below, could not be less than four hundred feet.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, for the vision had burst upon him suddenly, upon rounding a rocky boulder beside which he was now standing. "Is that the place we are looking, chief?"

"It is," was the reply.

"How in the world are we ever to get down there, eh?"

"There is a way, my brother."

"I see yonder by that fissure through the rocks?"

The chief shook his head.

"No," he replied. "That is the way by which the other chieftain will enter the valley with his prisoners. It is the only way he knows about; but there is another way."

"Where? I don't see a sign of a trail leading down the cliffs. It must be directly under where we are standing."

"There is a way—but my white brother must listen to Grey Feather before we enter the valley; and my white brother must swear that he will never reveal the pass I will show to him."

"I'll promise anything you like, chief, and I'll keep my promise, too. But what is it all about?"

"Listen. My father was a Kootenai, from far to the north and the west, beyond the mountains that are called Bitter Root; but my father had trouble with his people and left them, and that is why I have never lived with the people of my ancestors. My father was a great chief, and when it came time for him to die, he was very old, and very wise. He could not die among the people he had adopted, and he could not return to his own people, so he called me to him—I was only a boy then—and led me out into the mountains. He brought me here to this rock where we stand now, and he pointed into the valley below us. There were no buildings there then. The foot of a white man had never trod upon the grass that grows down there.

"And then my father said to me:

"'I am old; I am weary; the wisdom of many summers and winters is mine, but it does not avail me; the time is come when I must die; a year from now, you, my son, will journey hither, and bury my bones in the earth. Down there, in that valley, you will find them.'

"He left me then, and I watched him. I saw him descend into the valley, and from that I have known of the spirit's trail, for that is what it is. A year after that time I came here and followed the spirit's trail into the valley. I found the bones of my father, and buried them as he had commanded me to do. That is all, my brother."

"And now this Kid Curry has stolen the burial-place of your father from you, and made it one of his homes, eh?" said Nick.

"Yes; and I hate him for it. He is a white man, and I may not kill him. If I should do so it would make trouble for my people. I have brought you here that you may drive him out of the valley of spirits. When you have done that, I will bless you: my father will bless you from the other world, where he is waiting; but now he is here with us; he will walk beside us when we descend into the valley by the spirit's trail. Come, my brother."

He stalked majestically on ahead of the detective, toward a nose-shaped rock that jutted far out over the abyss below; and he passed around the face of it, seemingly stepping off into space as he did so.

But the detective, following him closely, saw when he got there that there was a narrow path scarce a foot wide, which wound along the very face of the cliff, and upon which it appeared to be impossible for a human being to travel without pitching into the void below.

But the Indian chief went steadily along it, almost without slacking his pace, or turning his head to look back.

It was plain now to the detective why the Indian had thought it impossible that one of the white men could follow him, for here was a place where it seemed as if a fly would barely find footing.

For just one instant—but for an instant only—the detective hesitated; but he knew that to draw back now would be fatal to his enterprise, and that it would earn the utter contempt of the young chief who was guiding him.

Once Nick glanced at the abyss beneath him, but he hastily withdrew his eyes from that frowning gulf and again fixed them upon the Indian ahead of him, who was proceeding slowly but calmly along that perilous way.

Repressing a shudder—for the detective confessed to himself at that moment that if he had been alone he would scarcely have ventured upon the attempt—and fixing his gaze firmly upon the form of the young chief, he started along the narrow way after him.

For the first few moments the experience was a terrible one. The detective felt at each instant that he was toppling over into the gulf, and he knew that it was a sheer fall of at least four hundred feet to the bottom; and so straight up were the cliffs, that if once he should pitch over, there would be nothing to stop his fall until he struck upon the floor of the valley, far below.

There is a sort of panic which will take possession of a man in such a place unless he has his nerves under perfect control. Fortunately, Nick's nerves were under perfect control, and so it happened that, although the first hundred feet were traversed in a sort of blind terror lest he lose his footing and fall, that feeling gradually died away, and was replaced by one of entire confidence; and, also, after a hundred yards had been covered, during which they descended at a gentle angle, the pathway widened somewhat.

Nick hoped that there was nobody in the house in the valley, for he realized that both he and the Indian were in full view from there, should a person chance to look up toward them. It did not occur to him that if there had been a hundred men there, it would not have occurred to one of them to gaze in that direction.

But as it happened they did not remain in plain sight from the valley below for a long time.

After descending perhaps a third of the distance, during which they had passed along almost the entire length of the valley's side, the Indian turned into a fissure in the rocks which was almost a cavern, so narrow was it above them, and from there the way led back into the heart of the mountain for a considerable distance.

And then began another perilous descent, for now there were niches cut into either side of the smooth rock, and the two men had to step with their toes from one to another of these niches, passing alternately from side to side of the fissure—that is, with each step they made they crossed it, and all the time they descended in almost a vertical line.

They passed again to the front of the fissure then—that is, to where it opened upon the valley, and from there they could look out over the quiet scene below them from a distance of not more than fifty feet above the level ground.

There was no sign of life down there that Nick could discover, and he mentioned the fact to Grey Feather.

"There is nobody there," he said; and the Indian shook his head negatively.

"No," he replied; "the robber chief has not yet arrived with his friends and prisoners."

"But isn't there anybody who stays here all the time?"

"No. The bad man would not permit that. This is the first time I have known him to bring strangers here. And it is not likely to be good for the strangers he brings. The man you call the Kid does not like to have others know his secrets, and when they get to know them too well, he kills them."

"Isn't it about time he arrived here, don't you think? Had he much farther to go than we had?"

"More than four times farther, white brother. It will be an hour yet, perhaps more, before they may arrive, and by that time we will be prepared for them."

"How are we to descend the remainder of the way to the valley? It must be fifty feet or more to the bottom yet."

"Look!" The Indian stepped farther back into the fissure, and then, from a hollow in the rock that had been concealed by a flat stone, he removed a ladder that had been fashioned out of strips of rawhide, and these in turn had been doubled and twisted until there was evidently strength in the slender affair to have supported the weight of several men at once.

To the lowest cross-strand of the ladder he tied a small cord, which he passed through a deeply notched piece of hard wood which was wedged into the rocks, and then motioning to the detective to precede him, they both descended to the ground below.

And here the Indian hoisted the scarcely made ladder to a position out of sight from where they stood, into the grotto over them, by pulling upon the cord he had fastened to it; and the end of the cord he made fast among some bushes, where it would not be discovered save only after a close search.

"It is always well to have a way open for escape, if one should become necessary," he remarked sententiously. "If anything should happen that we were obliged to fly, we could run to these bushes here—or either one of us who remained alive—and, by lowering the ladder again, could climb up there out of sight, and leave no trace behind us of the way we had come, or the way we had gone. And, now, will my white brother take the lead? From this moment he is chief, and it will be the pleasure of Grey Feather to obey his directions."

It was not far across the open space to the stockade which formed the corral; but the latter, when Nick peered into it, was not only empty, but its appearance proved that it had not been put to the uses of man or beast for a long, long time.

When they approached the log house, they found the same condition existing.

It was a building of only three rooms; a large one which extended entirely across the front, and two rooms at the rear, one of which was for a kitchen, and the other for a storeroom, or sleeping-room, as the occasion might require.

Furniture there was none save such as could be manufactured with rude tools. There was a table made of rough boards in the middle of the big room, and there were rows of bunks against the walls on each side—eight sleeping-places in all. In the storeroom there were two more bunks made after the same pattern, there was a small table, and scattered about all the rooms were boxes and stumps which had evidently been used as chairs.

There were a few dishes on shelves in the kitchen, and there was an open fireplace, made of stone, to serve as a cook-stove.

Floor there was none at all; the earth had to serve that purpose, and it had been beaten down hard and smooth, and was perfectly dry.

But Nick could not help wondering how long a time those two girls would be able to survive a life such as they would be compelled to live here, if it were not for the fact that he and Grey Feather were on hand to deliver them from their captors.

He turned to speak to the chief, to address a question to him, only to discover that the Indian had glided silently away, and left him alone—gone, no doubt, to scout down the path of approach to the outlaw's retreat.

The detective stepped to the door of the house to reconnoiter in the direction that the Indian had taken, and as he did so, Grey Feather appeared in sight again, coming from the fissure by which the outlaws must approach. And the instant he appeared, he called out in a low tone to the detective:

"They are here, my brother. The outlaws have come."

CHAPTER XI.

A TERRIBLE ALTERNATIVE.

Twilight had just fallen when the Indian made the announcement.

Already the high cliffs by which the valley was surrounded had thrown the mountain-nest into shadow, and while glints of sunlight could still be seen clinging to

the rocks high up the mountainside, below where Nick and the Indian awaited the coming of Kid Curry and his followers, with their prisoners, it was practically dark.

Grey Feather had glided swiftly forward after making the announcement, and now he stood respectfully near the detective, waiting orders which his very attitude bespoke him ready to obey to the letter. But Nick appealed to him.

"Where shall we conceal ourselves for a little while?" he asked.

"Come," replied the Indian laconically; and, turning swiftly, he led the way back again across the valley to the dense mass of bushes into which they had descended when they climbed down the ladder; and so, concealed by the black shadow of the bushes, Nick Carter, with the Indian chief beside him, watched the arrival of the outlaw chieftain at his own mountain fastness, having taken the trail in pursuit, four or five hours after Kid Curry had started with his prisoners, but, nevertheless, arriving at the destination in advance of him.

It was rather a remarkable thing to have accomplished, but the reader can see that it was due more to the good fortune of the detective, than to sagacity. But the point is that he was there, and that now he was on hand to protect the two girls who had been so roughly torn from their natural protectors, and carried off to endure terrible suffering in case they could not be rescued.

Kid Curry rode into the valley in the lead of his followers; Nick could see them all quite plainly from his point of vantage, although he understood perfectly well that he could not himself be seen.

Directly behind the Kid, with a rope around her waist—a rope that was fastened to the pommel of the Kid's saddle—rode one of the girls; Nick could not determine in that faint light, and at such a distance, which one it was, although he had no doubt that it would be Alice Corson, the heiress; the Kid would calculate thus far, without doubt.

Directly behind her was Scar Benson, and he also led a horse whereon was seated the other of the two young women. Behind him came Jew Jake and Blue Peter, and so on, in Indian file, the whole outfit came slowly into view.

The valley, it will be remembered, was small and oblong in shape—that is, it was rather longer than it was wide; but boxed in as it was by the high walls of rock on every side, voices could be heard, as well as every word that was uttered, throughout its entire length and width.

The detective plainly heard the Kid giving his orders and directions for the night.

"Take the young lady off her horse and stand her on her feet, Scar," Nick heard him say to Benson. "I will do the same for this one. Let them wander where they will; they won't be able to go very far away. Shorty, you give your horse over to the care of Pete, and you march back to the entrance to the trail and stand guard there till you're relieved. Pete, you and the others get the baggage off the horses, and turn them loose to graze. They'll find the water for themselves; and when you have done that, you ascend the cave yourself and get a fire going in the chimney as soon as possible. I'm about as hungry as a coyote. Scar, you come with me into the house and help me set things somewhat to rights in there. There's a small room that we can fix up for the use of the ladies. To-morrow, when we have got ourselves settled, we'll send to one of the railroad-towns for a parson, Jake!"

"Here I be, Kid," replied the Jew.

"You'll have to act as cook to-night. Now, get busy, all of you."

He had kept himself busy while he was talking, and already the young ladies were on the ground, where they immediately rushed into each other's arms, and spent the first few minutes after their arrival in sobbing. But the Kid interrupted them roughly.

"Come, girls, none uh that!" he ordered coarsely. "This ain't no bawlin' outfit, as you'll mighty soon find out. Yuh ain't goin' tuh get hurt. Now, shut up, both uh yuh, and answer me."

One of the girls, and Nick thought he recognized the voice of Alice Corson, straightened her slender figure, and replied:

"You despicable scoundrel! I have been told that you were a brave man, even if you were a thief and murderer; but nobody but a coward would attack two defenseless girls, as you have done."

"Oho, my beauty! Show your claws again, are yuh? Well, go ahead. It don't hurt none, and it does yuh good, I reckon. Besides, you're handsomer when you're mad. I didn't think that I was goin' tuh gather in any such prize as you are, when I tackled that ferry-boat uh your dad's."

"Oh, take us back again, sir; please take us back to him again. He will forgive you for everything you have done so far, if you will do that; but he will wreak a terrible vengeance upon you if you do not. He will pay you a ransom that——"

"I reckon he will, my beauty. I intend that he shall do that; but he shall pay it to his son-in-law when he does pay it, for you're going to be Mrs. Curry, my daisy. You hear me!"

"Perhaps you did not know that Nick Carter, the great detective, was on that boat with us," said Lola Craddock, speaking now for the first time; and the Kid turned upon her suddenly.

"What uh that?" he demanded crossly.

"Only this. We were talking about you and your career in this State, just after we left the ranch on the boat, and he told me that if you should ever return to the State of Montana he would like nothing better than to come out here and take your trail."

"Oh, he did, did he?"

"Yes, he did; and he said——"

"It don't cut any ice what he said, Miss Spitfire. He won't take no trail on this lay, yuh can bank your pile on that; and if he should, he wouldn't be able to follow it; and even if he should follow it, he could never break into this place without a balloon—which he ain't liable to have along with him on this trip. Do you understand, young woman, that if the hull army of the United States should folly us here, they could never get into this place until we chose to let 'em in? That ain't no idle dream, either; and in two days we'll have it so thoroughly stocked up with provisions that we could live here for months without having to go outside. Oh, I've got you two where I want you."

He wheeled on his heel and went into the house, where a fire had already been started, and presently he called from the doorway:

"Now, you gals, come in here and see how I have fixed up the place for you. You shall have a nice little

room all to yourselves for to-night, where you can look yourselves in if you want to, and be as safe as a church. To-morrow I'll make up my mind what I'm going tuh do with yuh."

Scar Benson laughed hoarsely.

"I know what I'm going tuh do with mine!" he ejaculated, and he took two or three swift strides toward Lola, who was at that moment advancing toward where he was standing. "I'm going to steal a kiss from her right now, that's what!"

He caught her in his arms before she could avoid him, and, although she screamed and struggled, he held tightly to her, and would have kissed her, as he threatened, had not the Kid at that instant stepped swiftly forward and sent him reeling backward to the ground with a terrific blow from his clenched fist.

Benson leaped to his feet with a yell of rage, and as quick-motioned as a cat, he had drawn his pistol from its holster and fired before the Kid realized what he was doing.

But, owing to the dazed effect resulting from the blow, he who was known as a dead shot somehow sent his bullet wide of the mark, for it only lifted the Kid's hat from his head, and knocked it to the ground, several feet away.

And the Kid——?

This was the sort of thing to which he was most accustomed. The bullet had barely been fired at him, the report of the pistol was still echoing along the rocky sides of the valley, when, without raising his own weapon from his hip, he fired by raising the hammer without touching the trigger, and Scar Benson half-turned around, as if he were on a pivot, and, partly springing into the air, pitched forward on his face on the ground, where he remained without so much as a struggle. He had been shot straight between the eyes, and was dead before he hit the ground.

"I reckon, Miss Craddock, that I'll have to find another husband for yuh now," said the Kid coolly. "Oh, yuh needn't look so mighty scared about it, miss. I saw et comin' ever since we started away from the river. I reckon I'd 'a' shot him anyhow, even if he hadn't taken a go at me. He was a-gettin' altogether too chesty, he was. Jake!"

"Here I be, Kid," called the other, approaching them.

"You and one uh the boys take that carrion down the trail about a mile and chuck him intuh that deep coulée. The wolves'll pick his bones 'fore mornin', and save yuh the trouble uh plantin' him. And, say, you fellers! All uh yuh! I want yuh tuh listen tuh me a minute."

He waited until he was assured that he had their attention; then he said:

"It'll be jest as well for the bunch if yuh all mark it down on your memories that I'm a-runnin' this here outfit, and that I don't want no help when it comes tuh doin' the bossin', either. Have yuh got that learned, boys?"

They said they had.

"Well, then, I'll tell yuh what I'll do. I ain't quite made up my mind whether I'll send to Major Corson and tell him that we've got the gals here, or not. If I decide not to do that, I'll tell him at the same time that we have sent them both back again, all safe and sound, if he'll cough up the fifty acres an' half a million in cash for 'em. And if I don't decide tuh do that, why, I'll send up the one uh the halfbreeds here for a parson, and I'll have the sky-pilot make me the major's son-in-law, all regular and proper. Have yuh got that down?"

"We have," replied Jake.

"Well, in that case, one of yuh can marry the other one when the parson gits here, and now that Scar Benson won't be botherin' us none, I'll let yuh all have an equal chance for the other girl."

"How's that, Kid?" asked one of the men.

"Well, after we've had supper and are feelin' a little rested, you can all start a game uh freeze-out, and the feller who wins all the money also wins the gal. How's that?"

They sent up a hoarse cheer, which echoed and re-echoed along the rocky sides of the valley; and immediately the men, one and all, grouped themselves around their chief, eager to have him arrange for the rules of the game at once—eager, indeed, to begin the play without delay, even without waiting to eat their suppers.

The young ladies had, of course, been obliged to listen to this terrible alternative of which they were to be the victims.

At the moment when Benson was killed they had flown again into each other's embrace, sobbing for very fright; and now, when the men grouped themselves around the outlaw chief, they drew gradually backward into the shadow, away from the house, seeking only to get out of the immediate range of vision of the outlaws; for it did not occur to them that hope of escape could be at hand. They knew that the entrance to the valley was guarded, and that even if it were not, they could not have escaped by flight.

But as they drew back farther into the darkness that surrounded the cabin, they also approached nearer to the spot where Nick Carter had been standing, for now the detective was moving cautiously forward toward them, closely followed by the Indian chief.

Nick would have gone directly toward them and have spoken to them at once, for it was safe to do so in the darkness, but he was afraid that in their excitement at finding him there they might cry out, and thus warn the outlaws.

But if the girls only continued to move in the direction they had taken they would soon be close enough to Nick for it to be safe for him to risk speaking to them.

They still walked backward, with their faces toward the cabin, where they watched the odd scene at the doorway, and at last Nick stepped close to them and spoke their names in a low and cautious tone.

CHAPTER XII.

KID CURRY'S HOPELESS STRUGGLE.

It is possible that the actual terror of the two girls had become so great that the power of crying out on account of any additional fright was denied them. It is certain that when the detective approached them, as he did, and, regardless of conventionalities, addressed them in a low tone by their given names, they stopped stock-still, as if suddenly galvanized into inactivity.

"Alice! Lola!" he said to them. "Don't cry out, please. It is Nick Carter who speaks to you. Stand as you are. Don't turn about as yet. Continue to walk backward as you are now, until I tell you to stop. Do you understand?"

"Yes," replied Lola Craddock. "Thank Heaven you are here!"

Indeed, it seemed nothing less than miraculous to the girls that Nick Carter, whom they had last seen aboard the house-boat on the Missouri River, should be at the robbers' retreat, already—should have been there even before they arrived.

But there was no time then for fruitless conjecture.

From a condition of abject terror the minds of the two girls had suddenly been turned to hope. From a state of utter helplessness, they were made to hope. Out of the surrounding dangers, where there seemed to be nothing that could come to their succor, a man had suddenly appeared in whom they had perfect confidence.

Night had fallen densely black by now down there at the bottom of that valley, although the stars were shining brightly enough elsewhere; but the valley was as if some mighty builder had dipped out a huge square with a gigantic spade, and even had there been a moon, it could not have lighted up that place, save when directly over it.

The group in front of the log cabin was still discussing eagerly the suggestions made by the chief of the outlaws, and apparently no attention was paid whatever to the two girls.

It is true that Kid Curry had seen them when they withdrew out of sight of the men and of himself; but he knew that the ravine which gave entrance to the valley was thoroughly guarded, and he did not know that there was another means of entering and leaving the valley, therefore, he paid no attention to them; and, presently, in listening to the discussion that was going on in his presence, he forgot them altogether for the moment.

As Nick Carter drew slowly backward, directing the girls to follow him, the Indian, who was indeed wise beyond his kind, glided away through the darkness to the place where he had concealed the cord which was fastened to the rawhide ladder, so that by the time Nick had reached the edge of the bushes, accompanied by the young ladies, he had it in readiness for them to use.

And as soon as the detective did reach the edge of the bushes, he stopped and addressed a few rapid words to Alice and Lola.

"You must do now exactly as I tell you to do," he told them. "There is an Indian chief here with me. He showed me a secret way into this place, known only to himself. It is not even known to the men who brought you here. It will be necessary for us to climb a rawhide ladder fifty feet into the air and through utter darkness, so one of you must cling to my back and the other must cling to the Indian while we are doing it—and you must both be extremely careful not to utter a sound. Come."

He seized each of them by one hand, and, turning them about, led them rapidly through the bushes to the base of the cliff, where they found Grey Feather standing like a bronze statue awaiting them. His arms were folded across his massive chest, and even in that dim light he looked handsome and powerful.

Lola Craddock, by Nick's direction, put her arms around his neck from behind, and [illegible] the Indian was borne up the ladder by the detective to the ledge far above them, while Grey Feather steadied the frail ladder from below.

And as soon as the detective was at the top and had emitted his burden, he told her to remain perfectly still until he returned, and then he ran hastily down it again and held it firmly, while the chief ascended, with Alice clinging to his back; and then, at last, when they were all safely upon the ledge, where they knew positively that the outlaws could not pursue them, the girls, as if by common consent, fell upon their knees there in the darkness, giving thanks for their deliverance.

And now the detective spoke quietly and seriously to them, when they had arisen from their knees.

"You must understand, young ladies, that we are not out of danger yet," he said. "It is true that there is a pathway through this fissure, and beyond it, by which Grey Feather and I entered the valley; but it is an exceedingly dangerous route to traverse, and we will not attempt to make use of it unless it is absolutely necessary. The place tried even my nerves when I came here; you can judge, then, how it might affect you."

"Then what are we to do?" asked Lola.

"First of all, you are to promise me to be brave; but I think you will do that."

"Yes," she said.

"Next, you are to consent to wait here in the dark while I return to the valley below——"

"But why must you do that, sir?"

"There are several reasons. One—the least important, possibly—is the fact that there is a large sum of money down there which belongs to your uncle. I wish to recover that, if possible. Another is that if we are kept prisoners here until after those robbers have gone away, as is likely to be the case, unless we attempt this other passage, we must have food. I think, when it is discovered that you are missing, the valley will be searched, and when it is proved to their satisfaction that you are not within it, the Kid will be convinced that you have somehow succeeded in passing the guard at the entrance, and so made your escape. In that case, they will all go after you. But all this is merely conjecture. The point is that you must wait here while I return, for important reasons, to the valley below."

"But you will not leave us entirely alone, will you?"

"No; Grey Feather will remain here with you. Hark! They are searching for you now. See, there are lights flashing all over the place. Listen; you can hear the Kid calling out his orders to them how to conduct the search. Listen to that! It was a pistol-shot."

"But what did it mean?" asked Alice.

"I think that Kid Curry has shot his sentinel for supposedly letting you pass."

"You will not go down there now—while they are so excited?" gasped Lola.

"No; I will wait a while."

And wait he did, for more than an hour, during which time the robbers could be seen running hither and thither, carrying lights with them while they searched every corner and crevice of the valley below. Nor was it a tedious or lengthy task, for the valley, save for the cluster of bushes directly beneath where the detective and his friends were concealed, was bare of hiding-places, and was surrounded by smooth sides of rocks, with not even so much as a niche where anything could hide.

Therefore, the search was not a long one. It was only a little while when the outlaws were convinced that the young women were no longer in the valley, and as there could be only one place where they could have escaped from it, according to the information possessed by the Kid, he immediately leaped to the conclusion that the

guard at the entrance to the ravine had been bribed by them to permit them to depart—and the Kid shot him.

And then it was that horses were brought forward, and that Shorty and Ike, led by Jake and Blue-nose Pete, dashed away in pursuit of the supposed fleeing girls. It was Shorty who had been on guard at the ravine, and who was shot so summarily by his chief; but the bullet that was intended to pierce his brain had only grazed his head, so he was soon ready for business again, and it did not take him long to convince the Kid that he would find the girls for him.

But the departure of the four left only Kid Curry in the valley to await their return; for the summary death of Scar Benson had reduced the number of the outlaws to five.

"Good!" exclaimed the detective, when he was aware of the fact that the Kid remained there alone. "They could not have arranged it better for me. Grey Feather, will you remain here with the young ladies, and guard them till I return?"

The Indian nodded in the affirmative.

"You may leave the ladder down, for when I return I expect to call to you to follow me. We must go out of here by way of the trail—and, on second thought, I want you all to be ready for the double cry of a whippoorwill. When you hear it, Grey Feather, carry the ladies, one by one, to the bottom of the ladder. I will have secured what horses remain. There are two, you know—no, three. We can mount the ladies on them, and I will probably have a prisoner to put upon the third one. Wait for the signal."

The Indian nodded that he understood, and Nick left them.

As he crept forward through the darkness toward the log cabin, he could see the shadow cast by the figure of Kid Curry as the outlaw chief moved to and fro through the big room of the house, and, presently, when the detective peered through the open door into that room, he saw the Kid bending over the leather box that belonged to Major Corson, and which contained the money that had been stolen.

The detective went closer, and finally stepped directly to the door, beyond which the robber was bending over the box, sorting and counting the money, and deftly laying parts of it at one side. It was evident to Nick that the man intended, during the absence of his followers, to appropriate part of the sum to his own uses before the others should have an opportunity to discover just how much was there.

But in stepping closer to the doorway, Nick touched against a stick of wood, which flew upward, and then rattled down again upon a stone, thus making a noise, which, though faint, was sufficient to startle the Kid into activity.

He leaped to his feet, and wheeled like lightning, at the same time pulling his ever-ready gun, making a swift leap through the doorway as he turned; and the bullet glanced along within the fraction of an inch of the detective's ear.

The next instant the two men had clinched, and Nick succeeded in pinioning the Kid's arms to his sides as he closed upon him, so that another weapon could not be drawn; and then for a moment there was a mighty struggle.

But it quickly came to an end.

Kid Curry was no match in strength for the Little Giant who had attacked him, and, after a moment, Nick broke loose from the hold that the robber had upon him, and then, pushing the Kid off at arm's length, while he still retained a hold upon the fellow's throat, he delivered one of his telling blows straight from the shoulder, with the result that Kid Curry went backward, as limp as a rag, knocked utterly senseless by the detective's fist.

With deft hands Nick bound him tightly; then he stepped to the door and delivered the whippoorwill call—and then, after carrying the Kid outside upon the grass, he rushed toward the horses of the outlaws, and captured them one by one.

In the meantime the Indian appeared, followed by the two girls, and he informed Nick, in his stoical manner, that he had pulled the ladder up again out of sight, and was ready to depart.

They mounted the girls upon two of the horses. The leather box that contained the money was strapped to the saddle behind one of them. Kid Curry, still senseless, was laid across the third horse, and securely tied there, and then, when all was in readiness, the detective directed them to wait a moment.

He rushed back again into the cabin, and, having discovered a large can of coal-oil, he poured it over the floor and upon the blankets that were there, and then set fire to it.

And then our party started down the ravine, Nick and the Indian running behind the horses that bore the young women, leaving behind them a steadily increasing glow as the flames began to eat into the thoroughly dried logs of which the cabin was made.

Although throughout what remained of the night they traveled slowly, and constantly kept on their guard to discover signs of the outlaws who had gone in search of the girls, they saw not a trace of them, for, guided by Grey Feather, they soon left the main trail, and made a cut across a spur of the mountain; and at sunrise the following morning they came upon the camp where Jim Thornhill and Bob Coburn, with the remaining two Indians, were only awaiting the coming of day to continue on the trail they were following on the retreat of the outlaw gang.

And so ends our story. Coburn and Thornhill continued on for some days in search of the few outlaws who had escaped, but it was finally decided that they had left the neighborhood; at all events, the chase was abandoned.

The young ladies, as well as the money that had been stolen, were restored to Major Corson, and the voyage of the house-boat down the river was resumed—resumed to have a wedding at the end of it, for Montague lost no time after the return of the girls in declaring his love for Lola Craddock.

Nick Carter, however, abandoned the house-boat trip then and there, and returned to Landusky as a guest of Wallace and Bill Coburn, and to await the return of Bob and Jim from their search of the mountains.

THE END.

The next issue of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY will contain, besides the usual departments, a complete long story, entitled "The Man from Arizona; or, Nick Carter Swims to Victory."

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

NEW YORK, August 24, 1907.

TERMS TO NICK CARTER WEEKLY MAIL SUBSCRIBERS.

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[illegible]	[illegible]	One year	$2.50
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STREET & SMITH, Publishers,
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TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

A French paper publishes an interesting account of Karl Hagenbeck, the famous German "beast merchant," and of his business. His father was a dealer in fish, but at an early age Karl took to the sea, made long voyages, lost fortunes as rapidly as he made them, then became a lion-tamer and showman, ultimately establishing the menagerie at Hamburg, which supplies animals, more or less wild, to nearly all the zoological gardens and menageries in Europe.

Hagenbeck sells every year seven or eight hundred lions, nearly as many tigers, three or four hundred elephants, several hundred [illegible], crocodiles, and serpents. He himself trains the wild beasts sent out for show, and is the first to take them in hand when they reach Europe.

The most expensive animals are the elephant, especially when very large, a fine specimen like the late lamented Jumbo fetching $15,000 or $20,000. A female hippopotamus, six years of age, is worth about $4,500, a rhinoceros $3,000, an Indian tapir $1,000; lions, according to their age and beauty, fetch from $200 to $2,000, home-bred lions being of comparatively little value. A fine tiger is not worth more than $1,000, a black panther $300, a leopard $160, a white bear $300, and a black bear $160. Among horned animals, giraffes and bisons fetch the best prices. Snakes are comparatively cheap. Hagenbeck employs a staff of men to scour the world for animals, many of whom are absent for years.

The first known mention of handcuffs, indicating the use of the counterpart of the modern fetter of that name, was in the twelfth century, when the Normans, perhaps, introduced in England three styles of these fetters, which were called, in the Anglo-Saxon idiom of the day, "hand-cops," "fot-cops," and "swur-cops," the latter two being used to fetter the feet and the neck respectively. They were undoubtedly the original types of the modern fetters used for these purposes.

In Queen Elizabeth's time there were in use fetters that were known as "barrel manacle" and the "shack-bolt," which differed [illegible] and foot-fetters, it seemed, in the particular that [illegible] bands.

[illegible] and has the word branded as a modern spelling of the ancient Anglo-Saxon hand-cop. It is further argued that the modern slang word "copper," for policeman, also has its origin in this old word cop, and that the policeman is so named because he "cops," or catches the offenders against the law.

The most remarkable of the modern fetters is that employed in Eastern countries, which, though it is called a handcuff, is in reality a sort of body-fetter. It is made of iron, shaped like a letter U, and is fastened either over the chest or behind the back by means of a hooked bar of iron, the hooks of which pass through loops at either end of the U-shaped bar. Such a form of handcuff would be worse than useless with us. Mexico produces a form of handcuff that is even more fantastic than the Eastern. One is made of light iron to bind the wrists, and the other is a ponderous affair to imprison the legs, that somewhat resembles a modern letterpress in construction.

The Mexican handcuff consists of three bars of iron uniting in a cross-piece at the top. The middle bar is made with a screw thread. The prisoner's hands are placed between the bars and made fast by a bar, which is forced against the wrist by means of a thumbscrew fitted on the middle bar.

There are slots in the end of the thumbscrew to permit a padlock to be fastened to it in such a way that the thumbscrew cannot be turned. According to modern needs this handcuff and its counterpart, the Mexican "leg-iron" are utterly useless and preposterous articles. They fittingly belong to the dark ages.

Strangely enough, however, the Mexican inventive genius which devised such impracticable fetters has given to the world one of the most effective of the fetters used in the transportation of prisoners who are known to be slippery fellows to handle. It is called the "Mexican Boot."

It is a heavy shackle fitting about the leg just above the ankle. It weighs anywhere from ten to twenty-five pounds. To prevent it from bearing down and crushing the ankle and instep of the prisoner, and also to prevent its removal, it fits upon an iron stirrup extending from the heel to the top of the prisoner's shoe. This stirrup has a heel-plate which is screwed to the prisoner's shoe. The leg-shackle is about three inches high and three inches across, made flat at the sides, but rounded at the top and bottom edges. It fastens with a lock that requires a very peculiar kind of key. When once locked it cannot be removed.

This boot was used not long ago on a prisoner who led a detective a chase across both continents, and was finally captured in our own country. He was an object of interest to the detectives of many cities. It was apparent at a glance that the prisoner could not get away, as it was utterly impossible for him to run with such a load on his ankle. The boot is a substitute for the ordinary ball and chain used in prisons, and it is a safer and more secure fetter, too.

In the transportation of prisoners by sea two other forms of fetters are also employed, both of foreign design. One is called the Melnotte Double and the other La Corde, the latter being for prisoners who are not of powerful build. It consists of a stout piece of whip-cord, with a double running-knot on one end. The noose is first fastened round the prisoner's wrist, then his hand is placed in his pocket, and the end of the cord is passed round his waist, and tied again to the noose. Thus fettered, the prisoner is comfortable so long as he behaves himself. Any attempt to remove the cord, however, causes it to cut into the flesh of his wrist until he desists.

The Melnotte Double consists of a lot of loops of catgut fastened together with padlocks at the ends. The ends are looped around the prisoner's wrists and fastened. The fetter gives the prisoner comparatively free use of his arms, as the cord is long. This fetter is also used in France in police raids to bind prisoners in couples for transportation to the station-house.

One of the oddest things in use is what is called the thumb-cuff, used to imprison the hands by binding the thumbs.

A pair of thumbcuffs closely resemble the Yale lock with a double end. When these are fitted over the thumb joints and locked they make a very secure fetter. This is generally used in prisons.

The handcuff most generally used in this country is what is called the twister. It is made of twisted catgut strings fastened to wooden handles. An extra string is twisted over the main strand. It can be used very swiftly and effectively. It is slipped over the wrist of a prisoner, the wooden ends are drawn together and twisted until the wrist is securely pinioned. A single twist is usually sufficient to subdue any show of a refractory spirit on the part of a captive.

This twister is even simpler than the somewhat similar implements used by the French detectives, which are called La Ligote and Le Cabriolet. The latter is made of several steel plane strings twisted into a strand, which cuts into the flesh when twisted hard upon the wrist. The other is made of whip-cords instead of the catgut like our own.

Something similar to the twister is the police nippers. They are made in several styles and patterns. There is another style called "police-hooks," which fit over the wrists like tweezers, and when the handles are locked steel prongs are forced down upon the prisoner's wrist, so that, should he make any trouble, he can be very quickly silenced or severely hurt.

The very best modern handcuff is the Champion, or giant handcuff. It is an American make. It consists of a big lock with hinged cuffs, or clasps, at each end. These clasps are slipped over the wrists while the prisoner's arms are drawn over his chest, the wrists being brought together so that the palm of the right hand rests against the left arm just above the wrist.

If the lock be placed so that the keyhole faces to the right of his chest, then so securely will the prisoner be manacled that were the detective to give him the key of the cuff and promise him freedom if he unlocked it he could not do so. Prisoners have been known to unlock handcuffs with the aid of a false key held between their teeth, but that would not work with the giant handcuff.

Experts have been known to free themselves when bound with handcuffs by hammering the lock against a wall or a stone until the lock-spring is broken, and they can wrench the broken cuff off.

One of the worst criminals London has ever known once got away despite the precautions taken in fettering him. He was supposed to be so securely manacled that escape was impossible, and he was being conveyed by train to prison. He escaped, however, and when recaptured it was found that he had released one hand from the cuffs, and with the free hand had opened the window and slid out of the train while it was going. It was a desperate deed, for liberty.

Handcuffs are not used so frequently as one might think nowadays. As a rule, when a criminal is caught, and he knows the game is up, he will walk along quietly and give no trouble.

It is only with the ugly tempered fellows that restraint must be used. These unruly customers are usually handcuffed with their hands behind their backs as a precautionary measure. A powerful man can make an offensive and sometimes dangerous weapon of his handcuffs when his hands are bound in front of him. He might suddenly raise his arms and bring the manacles down on the detective's head with all his force. The risk of such a blow is one that the wide-awake detective will always avoid by making it impossible.

The following fragment of sky has been used by [illegible] to illustrate a strong wind, the cirrus cloud there often being widely parted in the circumstances with which they are surrounded in these regions of cold.

The Rev. Father Anthony H. Stein, of Paterson, N. J., will recover from the attack of pneumonia which has threatened his life. More, the good, brave priest will have the lifelong satisfaction of knowing that his courage, gently exercised, and his advice, forcibly given, has converted the desperate highwayman who, with murder in his heart, held him up at midnight a few nights ago and demanded his money.

It was the shock of that night's experience, combined with exposure, that stretched Father Anthony on the sick-bed from which it was feared he would not arise.

The priest's door-bell rang, a servant admitted the untimely visitor.

"A man is dying," said he, and he gave a name and the location of a house four miles distant. "He cannot die in peace until Father Anthony gives him absolution."

Such a summons was never refused by the kind and pitying priest. The night was bitter cold, but, clothing himself as warmly as he could, Father Anthony went out afoot. He lost his way and was wandering when a man confronted him in the road.

"Hold up your hands," growled the highwayman, leveling a pistol. "Hand over your money. Don't yell, don't run. I've got you. Fork over, or I'll shoot—quick, now."

While he spoke, Father Anthony had recovered his composure.

"Would you do murder?" he asked, almost sadly. "Would you lose your eternal soul?"

"No guff, now," angrily commanded the midnight robber. "Hand over your coin or——"

"Man, man!" cried Father Anthony. "Would you forever damn yourself? What money can a poor priest give to you?"

"A priest!" exclaimed the highwayman, and his pistol dropped.

"Yes, a priest," answered the father unhesitatingly, approaching him. "In the name of the mother who taught you, I implore you to listen to me: Reflect, repent, turn from your evil way——"

"Forgive me, father," said the man in a broken voice. "I have had nothing to eat. I am starving—I must have money—I was ready to kill for money."

As if he were this wretched man's brother Father Anthony linked his arm in his. What arguments, what prayers, what threats the priest used no one will ever know. But contrite, in tears, the man who would have killed and robbed him led him to the house he sought. And before he left him at the door Father Anthony had given to him his little money, saying: "Get a bed, get food; come to me to-morrow."

The priest administered the last rites of the church to the dying man who had summoned him, and went home rejoicing that he had saved another man from himself and his passions.

Next day Father Anthony fell ill; pneumonia developed. His parishioners, loving him, are constantly calling at his house to make anxious inquiries about him.

And every day called the once desperate fellow, who would have shot him on the road, and once he brought some poor, half-faded flowers to the priest.

"Tell Father Anthony these are from the man he met the other night—and that man is praying"—then, almost fiercely—"yes, praying he will get well."

The Cossacks have for long been famous for their splendid horsemanship, and, judging from the following description of a display of their skill, which was written by an eye-witness, they well merit the distinction.

A number of these men, about sixty in number, mounted on strong, ugly little horses, were ordered to perform a sham skirmish. Forming themselves into two camps, each [illegible] attacked his opponent after his own fashion.

Here was a fellow standing bolt upright in the saddle and discharging his musket at another, who, hanging [illegible]

legs, returned fire underneath his horse; there were two Cossacks clinging like cats to the flanks and ribs of their chargers; and, thus completely sheltering their own bodies, they watched a favorable moment for shooting at each other, although to me it almost appeared as though the horses were riderless. Others flattened themselves at full length on their beasts' backs and maneuvered for the chance of some unguarded movement on the part of their foes. All this at full gallop, accompanied by a good deal of screaming and yelling.

Other feats were then performed. Galloping with the head downward in the saddle and the body and legs erect in the air seemed a favorite one; still more so, picking up a stone or even a coin at the same pace, the performer holding on the while to his saddle by his feet.

Two hours of this sort of work seemed to be enough for horse and man, so, closing up into a column four deep, the Cossacks marched home, singing in remarkably good time a native chorus with an accompaniment of two kettle-drums.

The natives of Mysore, in India, profess to be able to tell how soon a person bitten by a cobra will die. Under the neck of this snake there are patches of black stripes—five stripes to each full patch. According to native calculation, one hour for every patch is needed for the poison to act.

Consequently, when a person has been bitten, the first thing to be done—providing the snake be willing, of course—is to examine the number of patches on the reptile's neck. Thus, should there be two perfect patches and a portion of a third on the neck, they say that it is a "two-and-a-half-hour cobra"—meaning that death will follow in two hours and a half from the time of the bite. This seems to be the merest moonshine.

Perhaps the highest price ever given for a pin was one dollar, once paid by a young dude at a charitable bazaar. He had been prevailed upon by a little charmer to invest in a buttonhole bouquet marked up at fifty cents, in payment for which he tendered a two-dollar bill.

"Will you pin it in?" he asked the dainty maid—who, by the way, was attired in a neat Swiss costume.

"Certainly," she smilingly replied, taking a pin from her breast and fixing the flower.

"What are my services worth, sir?" said the fascinating little minx. "If you only knew how nice it looked, you would not begrudge another fifty cents."

The gentleman smiled a sickly smile.

"And the other dollar?" he tremblingly queried.

"Oh!" was the reply, "that's for the pin."

Curious and momentary fancies will sometimes lead a person to offer ridiculous amounts for articles of seemingly little value. A man will see a thing which tickles his fancy, he will offer a price, and if it is denied to him he will go to absurd limits to humor his whim. It is another instance of "He won't be happy till he gets it!" He has an insatiable longing to possess it; and possess it he will if he is stubborn enough to persevere, and his purse is deep enough to back him up.

A curious instance of this came to light recently.

A gentleman took a fancy to a piece of bric-à-brac which caught his attention at a house where he was visiting. He told his host bluntly that he liked it, and would pay anything for it. It was only a small china ornament, but the possessor would not part with it, and endeavored to laugh his friend out of his fancy. The visitor went away disappointed, and, on calling a few days later, was still more disappointed to learn that the article had been accidentally broken and thrown away. He asked for the bits; but these could not be forthcoming, owing to the clearance of the ash-barrel the day previously. Nothing daunted, the "fancier" sought out the housekeeper, offered a reward for the bits, and ultimately obtained them at a price ridiculously in excess of the original value of the unbroken article.

THE MYSTERIOUS MURDER.

BY W. W. MALOTT.

I arrived in Cincinnati for the first time, at the close of a cold, disagreeable day, October 19, 18—. I secured a room at the Burnet House, and retired at an early hour, resolved to get an early view of the wonders of the "queen city." I stayed some time, visiting the various places of amusement and interest. One night, I think it was the night of December 11th, I was at the theater and just as I was making my egress I was accosted by a man whom I had noticed eying me sharply. He came up and reached out his hand with a "Why, how are you, old friend?"

I reached out my hand, saying:

"You have the advantage of me; I do not recognize you."

"Is it possible you do not recognize your friend, Alfred Stanley, whom you parted from on the steps of the Astor House two or three months since?"

I now began to have a faint recollection of the occurrence mentioned; and remembered a friend had introduced a person of that name, as an artist of some distinction. He then informed me that he was staying at his sister's, while on his visit, and would be pleased to have me call whenever convenient.

"In fact, why not accompany me home? We have accommodations for another guest; although they may not be as good as you are accustomed to. So, come along," secing I hesitated.

We started and walked a square or two, when my friend hailed a street-car, which we entered and proceeded about half a mile. We then "took to our feet" again, and I found myself in a very humble part of the city, where the houses were of rather unpretending aspect.

"My sister's husband, owing to the dishonesty of some of his agents, failed, or at least he concluded to retire from business until he had learned the worst. He is now absent on business connected with it, and thinks he will secure nearly all of the money which was withheld fraudulently, which will enable him to start in business again. That is why you find us in such an humble part of the city."

This was what my friend told me as we walked along. Here my friend knocked at the door of a house of rather large proportions and more comfortable appearance. The door was opened by a woman apparently twenty-two or three years of age, in whose features, when introduced as his sister, I could trace no resemblance to that of the brother.

I thought I detected a singular look of intelligence pass between the two; but it was soon forgotten in the welcome which followed. I was lodged in truly hospita-

ble style, and was urged to make this my home while I remained in the city. Seeing it urged with so much earnestness, and my companions withal amiable and intelligent, I concluded to accept the invitation.

My room was in the second story of the house, with a window which looked out on a dark alley. One night, a week after I had taken up my lodgings in the house, I retired rather early, being somewhat fatigued. About midnight I was awakened from an uneasy slumber by the noise of whispering, apparently a conversation going on in the room below. I should have paid no attention to it, only from the fact of hearing my name pronounced in the voice of Stanley. As it was about midnight—I had just heard a clock strike twelve—I could not imagine the import of a conversation carried on at this hour. Remembering also the looks which passed between the pair, of which I took no notice at the time, I could not resist the temptation of hearing more of a conversation in which my name figured, carried on at such an unseasonable hour. I got out of bed and threw on my dressing-gown and approached my ear close to the floor.

I could hear but little, owing to the low tone in which the conversation was carried on, but I heard a male voice say:

"I have good reason to think he will be at home about to-morrow."

I could not catch the reply to this, and the man continued:

"We will have to exert ourselves, for I got this despatch at ten o'clock, and he may be nearer now than we imagine."

I here made a slight movement, and, as if alarmed, the talking was carried on in still lower tones.

I got back to bed, after puzzling my brain over this strange occurrence, but still determined "to see it out," I fell into a quiet slumber.

When I came down to breakfast next morning, I found only my hostess and a girl, a servant who had been here all the time of my stay, and I know not how much longer. She informed me that her brother had received a telegram in the night, which would force him to leave for a time, but had left word for me to make myself at home as usual, as he would return in the evening. I took a ramble through the most business portion of the city, and returned in time for a late dinner. Being wearied, I concluded to spend the afternoon in reading, as they had a good selection of books.

About three o'clock, as I was busily engaged in reading a book, there was a knock at the door. My hostess went down and returned with a pleasant looking man of some thirty years of age, whom she introduced as her husband, and called me a "friend of Alfred's." He "bade me welcome."

We spent the evening very pleasantly; but my hostess and husband soon retired, leaving me deeply absorbed in the fascinating pages of my book.

After a while I heard the front door open and thought I heard the voice of my hostess. Suddenly I heard a noise as of a desperate struggle, which was ended in a moment, and all was still. Presently Stanley came into the room, considerably flurried, with his face flushed as if with fever, his hands unsteady and shaking as if with an ague. He excused his appearance by saying he was not well, and that the train which he came in on had met with an accident, in which he had narrowly escaped with his life.

As it was getting late, he showed me up to my room and retired. As he turned to go out, he expressed the hope that I would sleep well, and closed the door; and as he did so I thought I heard a bolt shot into its socket.

I sat down by the fire and was conscious of a singular scent of a soporific influence. I got up and approached a little table, whereon I had laid my book, thinking I would read a while before I went to bed. There were several vials on it, one of which I picked up. A strong scent greeted my nostrils. I looked at the label—Chloroform! Here was a mystery. Why was chloroform left in my room, and the bottle unstopped?

I stopped the bottle and went to the window to let in some fresh air. It was fastened down! I then rushed to the door. Heavens! it was fastened, too! I staggered up to the bed and drew the curtains. Good heavens! what a sight met my vision! Reclining on the bed, with the head slightly raised, features in an awful contortion, and covered with blood, was the body of my host—the husband of my friend's sister—with a horrible gash across the throat extending from ear to ear.

At this moment I heard a cry of "Police! Murder!" in the voice of Stanley and his perfidious companion in wickedness. The policemen's rattles sounded, and there was a noise of several persons entering the house. My position flashed upon me in a moment. I would be arrested as the murderer; and my presence in the death-chamber, aided by the evidence of my treacherous friends, would be strong testimony.

All this was reviewed in less time than it takes to relate it. Here I was in the second story of a building, in the presence of death which would be ascribed to me, no method of egress or proving my innocence, and the officers of justice clamoring for admittance! A truly enviable position!

I flew to the window and essayed to wrench it open, but it resisted my utmost efforts. At this moment my eye rested on the poker, a stout piece of iron, which I grasped and with two or three blows forced it open, and found it opened on the roof of a sort of porch or piazza some six feet below the window-ledge. To make my exit at the window was but the work of an instant. The roof was so slanting I could hardly hold on, but I approached the edge and carefully looked over. It revealed the narrow width of a dark alley, but how far the ground was from the roof I could form no idea, owing to the impenetrable darkness.

From the noise at this moment, I concluded the officers had broken down the door, so I hesitated no longer. Grasping the spouting, I slid off the roof until I hung only by my hands, full length, and then let go. I "brought up" some twelve feet down, I suppose, for it stunned me considerably. I, however, "picked myself up" and "skedaddled" as fast as possible, and by daylight was clear of the city.

There was an excitement for some time through the newspapers, and I hear that Stanley is in prison, in another State for committing another murder; for I have no doubt of his being the author of this; but I never heard of any clue being found of the murderer or murderers in the case I speak of, and as I have no positive evidence against him, I keep silent. To this day I cannot visit the city without a shudder at the recollection of "The Mysterious Murder."

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